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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

CUNEIFORM CULTURE

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Frontispiece. A fish-cloaked *apkallu*-sage, the embodiment of cuneiform scholarship, created by artist Tessa Rickards based on original monuments from ancient Kalhu and Til-Barsip.

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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

CUNEIFORM CULTURE

Edited by

KAREN RADNER

and

ELEANOR ROBSON

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About the Contributors

Heather D. Baker participated in numerous excavations in Britain, Cyprus, Jordan, Turkey, and (especially) Iraq after graduating in archaeology from Cambridge. At Oxford she gained an MPhil in cuneiform studies and a DPhil in Assyriology. She has subsequently worked as a researcher for projects based at the universities of Helsinki (1999–2002) and Vienna (2003–08) where she is currently leading a research project, 'Royal Institutional Households in First-Millennium BC Mesopotamia'. Baker's research interests are in the social and economic history and material culture of Babylonia and Assyria. Publications include *The Archive of the Nappahu Family* (2004), *The Urban Landscape in First Millennium BC Babylonia* (forthcoming), and (as editor) *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, Part 2/I (2000), Part 2/II (2001), Part 3/I (2002) and *Approaching the Babylonian Economy* (2005, with Michael Jursa).

Barbara Böck (PhD Freie Universität Berlin 1996, Habilitation Freie Universität Berlin 2002) is a Tenured Researcher at the Spanish Council of Scientific Research (CSIC) in Madrid. Her main field of research is the scholarly tradition of the first millennium BC, with a special focus on the medical knowledge of ancient Mesopotamia; she is currently working on medicinal plants. Other research interests are systems of religious and magical belief. Publications include the study and principal text edition of sources for the divinatory practice of physiognomy (*Die babylonisch-assyrische Morphoskopie*, 2000) and incantations used in magical and medical therapies (*Das Handbuch Muššuʾu 'Einreibung'*, 2007).

Nicole Brisch (PhD University of Michigan 2003) is a University Lecturer in Assyriology at the University of Cambridge. Her research interests include Mesopotamian literature, the socio-economic history of the Ur III period, and Mesopotamian religion. She is the author of *Tradition and the Poetics of Innovation: Sumerian Court Literature of the Larsa Dynasty (c. 2003–1763 BCE)* (2007) and the editor of *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond* (2008). Her current research concerns sacrifices to divine and royal statues in the Old Babylonian period.

Hagan Brunke studied physics (Diploma 1993, Technische Universität Munich) and Mathematics (PhD 1998, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich) as well as Assyriology with Egyptology as minor (PhD 2008, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich). At present he is working as a researcher at the Institut für Altorientalistik of

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the Freie Universität Berlin and at the Institut für Mathematik of the Humboldt-Universität Berlin. He is particularly interested in Sumerian economy and in Mesopotamian mathematics.

Grégory Chambon is Maître de Conférences at Université de Bretagne Occidentale at Brest. His main research interests belong to the history of science and technology of the ancient Near East, with recent work focusing on the use of measures and numbers in their social context, and on the continuities and discontinuities in metrological and scribal practice in third and second millennium BC Syria. The author of a book on wine in Old Babylonian Mari (*Les archives du vin à Mari*, 2009), he is currently preparing the publication of his PhD thesis (*Normes et pratiques: l'homme, la mesure et l'écriture en Mésopotamie*) and an edition of texts from Mari documenting trade practices.

Dominique Charpin is Professor of Mesopotamian History at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne, Paris) and editor of the *Revue d'Assyriologie*. As the field epigrapher at Larsa (Iraq) and Mari (Syria), he has published numerous Old Babylonian texts from these sites and elsewhere. He has written extensively on this period's political, economic, social, and cultural history. Among his most recent publications are *Writing, Law and Kingship in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (2010), a collection of some of his most influential French articles, and the monograph *Reading and Writing in Babylon* (2010), a translation of his *Lire et écrire à Babylone* (2008). He directs the ARCHIBAB project (http://www.archibab.fr), which is devoted to the online publication of Old Babylonian archival texts.

Philippe Clancier is Maître de Conférences at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. The author of a book on Late Babylonian libraries (*Les bibliothèques en Babylonie dans la deuxième moitié du Ier millénaire av. J.-C.*, 2009) and a contributor to the online *Corpus of Ancient Mesopotamian Scholarship* (http://oracc.org/cams), his main research focuses on Hellenistic Babylonia, especially the sources from Babylon, Uruk, and Borsippa. He also works on the Middle Euphrates region during the first millennium BC and is in charge of the publication of the Middle Assyrian tablets from Khirbet ed-Diniyeh.

Yoram Cohen is Senior Lecturer of Assyriology at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures, Tel Aviv University. He is the author of *The Scribes and Scholars of the City of Emar in the Late Bronze Age* (2009) and, with Lorenzo d'Alfonso and Dietrich Sürenhagen, the editor of *The City of Emar among the Late Bronze Age Empires: History, Landscape, and Society* (2008).

Geert De Breucker studied classics and ancient Near Eastern studies at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and the Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, and wrote his PhD thesis at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen on the Babyloniaca of Berossos and its cultural setting. His main research interests are in Babylonia in the

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Hellenistic period and the cultural interactions between the Greek world and Mesopotamia.

Sophie Démare-Lafont is Professor of the History of Law at Université Panthéon-Assas and at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. Her main research interests belong to legal documentation from Mesopotamia and the comparison between this and biblical sources. The editor of a volume exploring the political and legal implications of oath-taking (*Jurer et maudire: pratiques politiques et usages juridiques du serment dans le Proche-Orient ancien*, 1996) and author of a study on women and criminal law (*Femmes, droit et justice dans l'antiquité orientale: contribution à l'étude du droit pénal au Proche-Orient ancien*, 1999, based on her 1990 dissertation at the Faculté de Droit de l'Université de Paris-II), she recently edited a book, with A. Lemaire, tracing legal formulae in documents recorded in various Semitic languages (*Trois millénaires de formulaires juridiques*, 2010).

Robert K. Englund is Professor of Assyriology and Sumerology at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures of the University of California, Los Angeles. He has conducted his major research on the proto-cuneiform texts from late fourth-millennium BC Mesopotamia as well as on administrative texts from the Ur III period, and, as principal investigator of the project *Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative* (http://cdli.ucla.edu), Los Angeles and Berlin, on the electronic documentation and edition of cuneiform generally. For his work on open access initiatives and the use of information technology in cuneiform studies, he was honoured by the National Humanities Center with the 2004 Richard W. Lyman Award.

Benjamin R. Foster is Laffan Professor of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature and Curator of the Babylonian Collection at Yale University. He is author of nine books, including three studies of the social and economic history of early Mesopotamia (*Umma in the Sargonic Period*, 1982), four studies of Akkadian literature (*Before the Muses*, 1993, 1996, 2005; *From Distant Days*, 1995; *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 2001; *Akkadian Literature of the Late Period*, 2007), two historical surveys (*Iraq Beyond the Headlines: History, Archaeology, and War*, 2005; *Civilizations of Ancient Iraq*, 2009), and numerous studies and essays.

Eckart Frahm (PhD Göttingen 1996, Habilitation Heidelberg 2007) is Professor of Assyriology at Yale University. Primarily interested in the history and culture of Mesopotamia in the first millennium BC, he is the author of a book on the inscriptions of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (*Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*, 1997) and an edition of Assyrian historical and historical–literary texts from Assur (*Historische und historisch-literarische Texte*, 2009). His study of Babylonian and Assyrian text commentaries and the beginnings of ancient hermeneutics, and his edition (authored with Michael Jursa) of two hundred Late Babylonian letters from ancient Uruk now in the Yale Babylonian Collection are forthcoming.

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Andreas Fuchs is Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen. His research focuses on the history, historiography, and historical geography of the ancient Near East in the Neo-Assyrian period. He has edited royal inscriptions of Sargon II and Assurbanipal and published several books and articles on Assyria's political and military history.

Fabienne Huber Vulliet is preparing her PhD thesis on cultic personnel during the Ur III period at the University of Geneva. She is a researcher on the 'Sumerisches Glossar' project at the Institute of Assyriology and Hittitology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich.

Michael Jursa is Professor of Assyriology at the University of Vienna. He currently directs a research project on Babylonian epistolography in the first millennium BC. His books include *Aspects of the Economic History of Babylonia in the First Millennium BC* (2010) and *Letters and Documents from the Eanna Archive* (2011).

Sivan Kedar is a PhD student at the School of Jewish Studies, University of Tel Aviv, researching craftsmen in the Neo-Assyrian Empire. She teaches Akkadian at several Israeli universities and participates in the online project *Cuneiform Texts Mentioning Israelites, Judeans, and Related Population Groups* (http://oracc.org/ctij).

Ulla Susanne Koch holds an MA and a PhD from the University of Copenhagen, where she acts as external examiner in Ancient Near Eastern Studies. She is also a special advisor of the Defence Command Denmark. Her main interests are Mesopotamian divination, religion, and literature. She is the author of *Mesopotamian Astrology: A Survey of Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination* (1995), two volumes of editions of extispicy texts from the library of Assurbanipal, and a forthcoming study of Mesopotamian divination texts from the first millennium BC.

Frans van Koppen teaches at Birkbeck College, University of London. His research focuses on the Old Babylonian period, specifically its social and political history.

Brigitte Lion is Professor of Ancient Near Eastern History at the University of Tours. Much of her research concerns the cuneiform texts of the second millennium BC, especially from Nuzi; she has published, with Diana Stein, a monograph on a family archive from this site (*The Pula-Hali Family Archives*, 2001) and her work on Nuzi continues. Her research also focuses on gender issues, and she is the author of several articles on the relationship between women and literacy.

Anne Löhnert is a lecturer at the Institute of Assyriology and Hittitology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. The author of a book on lamentations in the Old Babylonian period (*'Wie die Sonne tritt heraus!' Eine Klage zum Auszug Enlils mit einer Untersuchung zu Komposition und Tradition sumerischer Klagelieder in altbabylonischer Zeit*, 2010), her research so far has focused on Sumerian literature (especially cultic texts) as well as the transmission of literary works in the second and

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first millennia BC. More recently her research interests have started to focus on to the administrative archives of Nuzi.

Karen Radner (PhD Vienna 1997, Habilitation Munich 2004) is Reader in Ancient Near Eastern History in the History Department at University College London. Her main research interests are in Assyria, especially the period from the 9th to the 7th centuries BC, on whose political, social, economic, legal, and religious history she has published extensively. Her books include editions of Middle and Neo-Assyrian archives and a study on how the awareness of man's mortality shaped Mesopotamian culture (*Die Macht des Namens: altorientalische Strategien zur Selbsterhaltung*, 2005). She directs an AHRC-funded research project on the correspondence between the Assyrian kings and their magnates in the 8th century BC (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sargon).

Eleanor Robson is Reader in Ancient Middle Eastern Science in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on the socio-political contexts of intellectual activity in ancient Mesopotamia and the online edition of cuneiform texts. She is the author of *Mathematics in Ancient Iraq: A Social History* (2008) and director of the AHRC-funded research project, *The Geography of Knowledge in Assyria and Babylonia, 700–200 BC* (http://oracc.org/gkab).

Francesca Rochberg is Catherine and William L. Magistretti Professor of Near Eastern Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Studies, the Office for the History of Science and Technology, and the Graduate Group in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of California, Berkeley. She has edited cuneiform astrological and astronomical texts and written on the cultural history of the astral sciences in ancient Mesopotamia and the ancient Mediterranean worlds. She is series co-editor with Alan C. Bowen of Interpretatio: Sources and Studies in the History and Philosophy of Classical Science.

Daniel Schwemer (PhD Würzburg 2000, Habilitation Würzburg 2005) is Reader in Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. His main research interests are the religion, magic, and literature of ancient Mesopotamia and Anatolia; publications include *Die Wettergottgestalten Mesopotamiens und Nordsyriens im Zeitalter der Keilschriftkulturen* (2001), *Rituale und Beschwörungen gegen Schadenzauber* (2007), and *Abwehrzauber und Behexung: Studien zum Schadenzauberglauben im alten Mesopotamien* (2007).

John M. Steele is Associate Professor of Egyptology and Ancient Western Asian Studies at Brown University. His research focuses on the history of early astronomy, with particular reference to Babylonia. He is the author or editor of five books, including recently *A Brief Introduction to Astronomy in the Middle East* (2008), *Calendars and Years: Astronomy and Time in the Ancient Near East* (2007), and *Calendars and Years*, 2: *Astronomy and Time in the Ancient and Medieval World* (2011), and many articles on ancient astronomy.

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Michel Tanret is Full Professor of Assyriology and Ancient Near Eastern History at Ghent University and coordinates the research cooperation between the Belgian university departments teaching ancient Near Eastern studies. His principal field of interest is the Old Babylonian period and its social and economic history. Recent books focus on scribal education (*Per aspera ad astra: l'apprentissage du cunéiforme à Sippar-Amnanum pendant la période paléobabylonienne tardive*, 2002) and on the seals of priests (*The Seal of the Sanga: On the Old Babylonian sangas of Šamaš of Sippar-Jahrurum and Sippar-Amnanum*, 2010). He is currently preparing an edition of the archive of Inana-mansum and Ur-Utu from Sippar-Amnanum.

Jonathan Taylor is Curator of Cuneiform Collections in the Department of the Middle East at the British Museum. His research interests include literacy and education in the ancient Near East, as well as the non-textual features of clay documents. Currently he is investigating attitudes towards, and uses of, the past in the ancient Near East itself.

Steve Tinney is Clark Research Associate Professor of Assyriology at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Associate Curator-in-Charge of the Penn Museum's Babylonian Section, and Director of the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary Project. He is active in a range of online projects and is the author of *The Nippur Lament: Royal Rhetoric and Divine Legitimation in the Reign of Išme-Dagan of Isin (1953–1935 BC)*, 1996. His principal research interests are Sumerian language and literature and the emergence of the scholarly tradition.

Niek Veldhuis (PhD Groningen 1997) is Associate Professor of Assyriology at the University of California at Berkeley and Director of the *Digital Corpus of Cuneiform Lexical Texts* (http://oracc.org/dcclt). His main research interests focus on the history of education in Mesopotamia in its relationship with intellectual history and the uses of writing. He is currently working on a history of the lexical tradition from the late fourth millennium BC to the demise of cuneiform around the beginning of the common era.

Eva Von Dassow teaches the history and languages of the ancient Near East at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *State and Society in the Late Bronze Age: Alalaḫ under the Mittani Empire* (2008), co-author of *Cuneiform Texts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol. 3 (2000), and editor of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day* (1994; 2nd rev. edn 1998). Her recent research examines the conceptualization of citizenship and the constitution of publics in ancient Near Eastern polities, written records as artefacts of cultural practice and temporal process, and the nature of writing as an interface between reader and reality. Among her current projects is a study of the Hurrian *Song of Liberation*, exploring the political dimensions both of the poem's composition and of its later textualization in a bilingual Hurro-Hittite edition.

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Caroline Waerzeggers is Lecturer in Ancient Near Eastern History in the History Department of University College London. Her research focuses on the social and economic history of first-millennium BC Mesopotamia, and on the archival material from Neo-Babylonian and early Achaemenid Sippar and Borsippa in particular. She is the author of *The Ezida Temple of Borsippa: Priesthood, Cult, Archives* (2010) and directs an ERC-funded research project investigating new perspectives on Second Temple Judaism from cuneiform texts.

Mark Weeden concentrates his research on the written cultures of northern Syria and Anatolia. He is a British Academy post-doctoral research fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, with a research project on the Akkadian of Alalakh. His PhD thesis was completed at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, a revised version of which will be published under the title *Hittite Logograms and Hittite Scholarship* in 2011. He is jointly responsible (with D. Yoshida) for the publication of hieroglyphic-inscribed artefacts from the Japanese excavations at Kaman-Kalehöyük, Yassihöyük, and Büklükale, as well as being an epigrapher for the Turkish excavation at Ova Ören, all in central Anatolia.

F. A. M. Wiggermann (PhD Free University of Amsterdam 1986) is retired, but as epigrapher is still involved in the Dutch excavations at Tell Sabi Abyad in Syria. His present interests include the administration of the Assyrian state in the Late Bronze Age, religious iconography, and first-millennium library texts, subjects on which he has been publishing all his life.

Silvie Zamazalová studied ancient history and Egyptology at University College London, where she is now pursuing her PhD, researching geographical concepts in the Neo-Assyrian empire at the end of the 8th century BC.

Nele Ziegler has been a researcher at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (UMR 7192, Paris, from 1999) and a member of the team of epigraphers working on the palace archives of Mari. Her editorial work on these texts is part of her wider interest in the history of the Old Babylonian period. The author of books on Mari's female palace inhabitants (*La population féminine des palais d'après les archives royales de Mari*, 1999) and on the musicians of Mari (*Les musiciens et la musique d'après les archives de Mari*, 2007), she collaborated with Dominique Charpin on a study of the political history and chronology emerging from the Mari sources (*Mari et le Proche-Orient à l'époque amorrite: essai d'histoire politique*, 2003). Her current research focuses on the archives from the time of Samsi-Addu and on the historical geography of northern Mesopotamia (with Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, she has recently published an edited volume, *Entre les fleuves: Untersuchungen zur historischen Geographie Obermesopotamiens im 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, 2009). She teaches at the École du Louvre and at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, both in Paris.

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Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson

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A Note on Typographical Conventions

Readers of this book do not need to know the languages or scripts of the ancient Near East; although contributors sometimes use ancient words or texts, they alway provide English translations. The languages written in cuneiform script may be rendered alphabetically in two different ways: *transliteration*, which is an alphabetic representation of cuneiform signs; and *transcription* or *normalization* (these words are synonymous), which is an alphabetic representation of the language that does not give any information about the signs used to write the original text.

In alphabetic normalization in this book, we write both Sumerian and Akkadian words just like any foreign language: in italics with no hyphens or full stops or superscripts (e.g. Akkadian *ṭupšarru* 'scribe' and Sumerian *sanga*-priest).

In transliterations of Akkadian, the syllabic signs are presented in lower-case italics and separated by hyphens (e.g. *ṭu-up-šar-ru*), while logograms (signs representing whole words) are written in small upper-case letters and separated by full stops (e.g. DUB.SAR, a logographic writing of *ṭupšarru*). For transliterations of Sumerian, this book uses lower-case bold face, separating signs with hyphens (e.g. **dub-sar** 'scribe'). For both languages, determinatives are written in superscript lower-case, with no connecting punctuation (e.g. ^{lú}DUB.SAR and ^{lú}**dub-sar**). Sign names are transliterated in capital letters, and signs within signs joined with × (e.g. TU_6 = KA×LI = *šiptu* 'incantation', where KA×LI means 'the sign KA with the sign LI written inside it').

In transliteration, normalization, and translations, square brackets enclose restorations of missing text, while uncertain translations are marked with question marks or set in italics.

See Veldhuis and Weeden in this volume, and Robson (2009, listed in the references to the Introduction) for more on Assyriologists' typographical conventions for representing cuneiform script.

Introduction

KAREN RADNER AND ELEANOR ROBSON

The term 'cuneiform culture' is not simply a synonym for the ancient Near East but the conceptual framework that provides cohesion to this volume. It is impossible to do justice to all of ancient Near Eastern culture chronologically, geographically, and linguistically, even in a book of this size. Instead, we examine it through the lens of cuneiform writing—the writing technology that is not only fundamental to a modern academic understanding of the region but which also bound the ancient inhabitants into a shared set of ways of understanding and managing their world. The title of this book, *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, therefore reflects its emphasis on cuneiform literacy and the literate segments of society, or 'textual communities', following Brian Stock's definition of the latter as 'microsocieties organized around the common understanding of a script' (Stock 1990: 23).

The cuneiform writing system of the ancient Middle East was deeply influential in world culture. For over three millennia, until about two thousand years ago, it was the vehicle of communication from (at its greatest extent) Iran to the Mediterranean, Anatolia to Egypt (Figure 0.1). A complex script, written mostly on clay tablets by professional scribes, it was used to record actions, thoughts, and desires that fundamentally shaped the modern world, socially, politically, and intellectually. Unlike other ancient media, such as papyri, writing-boards, or leather rolls, cuneiform tablets survive in their hundreds of thousands, often excavated from the buildings in which they were created, used, or disposed of. Primary evidence of cuneiform culture thus comes from a wide variety of physical and social contexts in abundant quantities, which enables the close study of very particular times and places.

But although cuneiform is witness to one of the world's oldest literate cultures, the academic discipline devoted to it, Assyriology, is still a relatively new and underdeveloped field at just over 150 years old. Cuneiform writing shaped the economies and societies which used it, just as its limitations and possibilities were inseparable from intellectual thought about the world. But modern cuneiformists have traditionally studied either socio-economic history or intellectual and cultural history, which themselves have been balkanized into modern categories such as 'literature', 'religion', 'magic', and 'science'. Political history is a third strand which has hitherto rarely been integrated with

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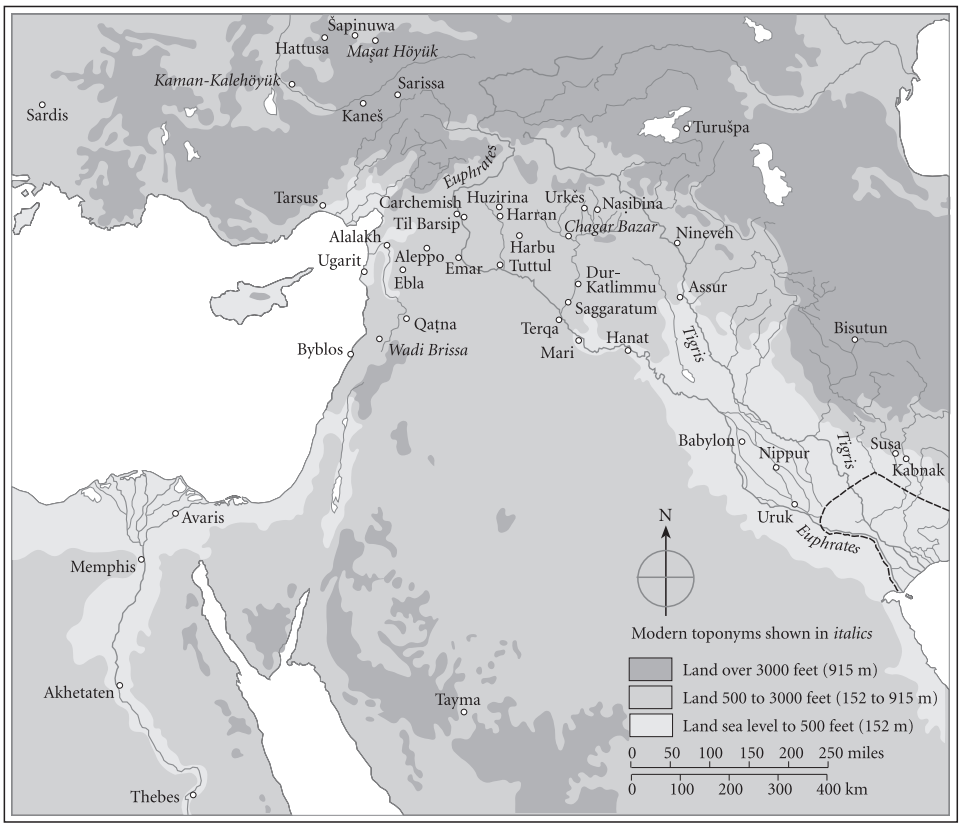

FIGURE 0.1 Map of the ancient Near East, showing the major places mentioned in this book

the study of the other two, except as an ordering and dividing principle. This division of labour has created two distinct images of the ancient Near East. Socio-economic studies produce a strangely familiar world of high finance, bureaucracy, and international law and diplomacy, while intellectual and cultural studies recreate an ancient Near East that is exotic, alien, full of sorcerers, demonic forces, and auspicious signs. Rarely are these parallel worlds superimposed on each other.

The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture draws together these hitherto disparate topics and methodologies to project a new image of the literate ancient Near East. It seeks to restore context and coherence to the study of cuneiform culture by approaching it holistically: through the social, the political, and the intellectual, by means of textual sources whose materiality is fully acknowledged. Mesopotamia's clay tablets and stone inscriptions are not just 'texts' but also material artefacts that offer much additional information about their creators, readers, users, and owners. Whenever appropriate and possible, the contributors to *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* explore, define, and to some extent look beyond the boundaries of the written word. We hope that the book goes some way towards nuancing the depiction of the ancient Near East in both learned and popular literature.

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To this end, we have commissioned chapters from a mix of scholars from across the discipline and around the Assyriological world, female and male, old hands alongside those just beginning their careers. The contributors' remit was to transcend the political, geographical, chronological, and linguistic boundaries that have been constructed by modern research over the past century or more, and to cut across conventional temporal and spatial categories. They have each risen wonderfully and good-naturedly

Table 0.1 Timeline of Cuneiform Culture

	Political history and periodization	Key people and places
Later fourth millennium	Urbanization and literacy:	
	Uruk period, *c.* 3200–3000 (Uruk IV, Uruk III)	the city of Uruk
		the site of Jemdet Nasr
Early third millennium	City-states:	Sumerian city of Šuruppak (Fara)
	Early Dynastic period, *c.* 3000–2350	Syrian city of Ebla
Later third millennium	First territorial empires:	king Sargon of Akkad and his daughter Enheduana, *c.* 2300
	Akkadian or Sargonic dynasty, *c.* 2350–2200;	Gudea, city ruler of Lagaš, *c.* 2150
	Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III), *c.* 2100–2000	king Šulgi of Ur and his successors, *c.* 2100–2000
Early second millennium	Short-lived kingdoms of the Old Babylonian period (*c.* 2000–1600):	king Zimri-Lim of Mari and his courtly entourage, *c.* 1760
		king Hammurabi of Babylon, *c.* 1750
	Isin, Larsa, Mari, Ešnunna, and Babylon	the scribes and students of Nippur, *c.* 1740 BC
		Ipiq-Aya the scribe of Sippar
		Ur-Utu the chief lamenter of Sippar
Later second millennium	Age of international diplomacy:	Hittite city of Hattusa
	Kassite or Middle Babylonian period;	Egyptian city of Amarna
	Middle Assyrian empire;	Syrian city of Ugarit
	Amarna period, *c.* 1400	the Zu-Ba'la family of diviners in Emar
Early first millennium	Age of empires:	
	Neo-Assyrian empire, *c.* 900–612	kings Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal of Assyria and their advisors
	Neo-Babylonian empire, *c.* 620–540	king Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon and his temple personnel
Later first millennium	End of native rule:	
	Persian or Achaemenid period, *c.* 540–330	king Alexander the Great, *c.* 330
	Seleucid or Hellenistic period, *c.* 330–125	Berossos, historian of Babylon, *c.* 300
	Parthian or Arsacid period, *c.* 25 BC–AD 225	the priests and scholars of Uruk

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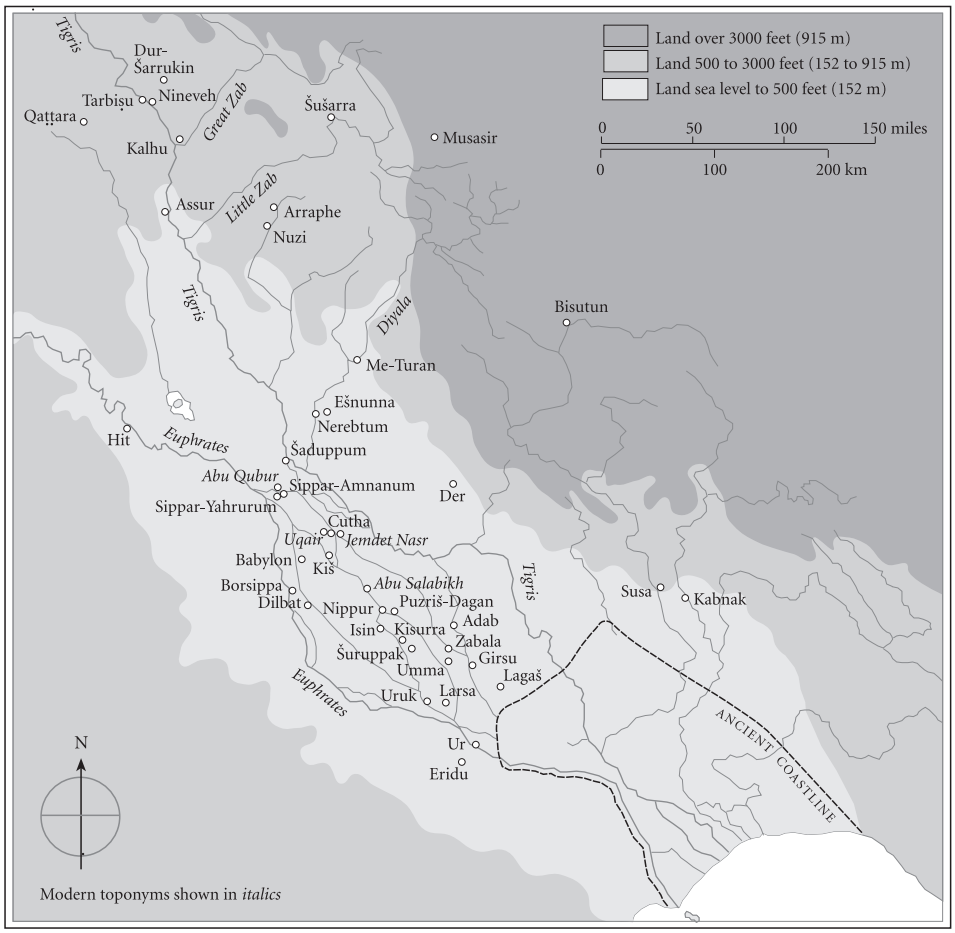

FIGURE 0.2 Map of ancient Mesopotamia, showing the major places mentioned in this book

to the challenges we set, and we are immensely grateful to all of them. They have drawn on the best scholarship of recent decades and integrated a multiplicity of fruitful approaches, highlighting open problems and helping to set agendas for subsequent research.

The resulting book is not structured by periods (see Table 0.1)[1] or places (Figures 0.1 and 0.2) but around seven themes: 'Materiality and literacies', 'Individuals and communities', 'Experts and novices', 'Decisions', 'Interpretations', 'Making knowledge', and 'Shaping tradition'. Each of these sections encompasses a brief introduction and five chapters. While these chapters cover three thousand years of cuneiform culture from the late fourth millennium to the 2nd century BC, *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* seeks to be exemplary rather than exhaustive, focusing on methodologies rather than on blanket coverage. Several of the authors have used a deliber-

[1] For reasons of uniformity, all dates in this volume are given in the conventional Middle Chronology, following the regnal dates established by Brinkman (1977).

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ately diachronic approach (Foster, Löhnert, Lion, Robson, Steele, Taylor, Veldhuis, and Wiggermann) or selected two or more case studies from different periods to make their point (Chambon, Cohen and Kedar, Frahm, and Von Dassow), but two periods of Mesopotamia's past have very clearly emerged as the focal point of the majority of the contributions. One is the end of the third millennium to the first half of the second millennium BC, the so-called Ur III and Old Babylonian periods. During this time, an age of territorial states, Mesopotamia's political set-up was shaped by the rivalries and alliances of a mosaic of small kingdoms that periodically coalesced into much larger units, with Ur for seventy years and later Babylon for 175 years as the political centres of states controlling Mesopotamia (Brisch, Brunke, Charpin, Démare-Lafont, Huber Vulliet, van Koppen, Tanret, Tinney, and Ziegler). The second focal point is the 'Age of Empires' from the mid-8th to the late 6th century BC (Baker, Böck, Fuchs, Jursa, Koch, Radner, Rochberg, Schwemer, Waerzeggers, and Zamazalová), when the Neo-Assyrian and later the Neo-Babylonian empires dominated the political history of the Middle East. This twin emphasis is due to the exceptionally rich textual remains which document these periods from sites across Mesopotamia, most especially Assur, Babylon, Kalhu, Mari, Nineveh, Nippur, and Sippar. Three chapters deal with the very beginning of cuneiform culture in the southern city of Uruk in the late fourth millennium BC (Englund) on the one hand, and its last guardians, active in this very same city and elsewhere in Babylonia as late as the 2nd century BC (Clancier and De Breucker) on the other. Another chapter looks at 'cuneiform abroad', analysing how the Mesopotamian writing system was adapted for use in Anatolia under Hittite rule in the mid-second millennium BC (Weeden).

The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture aims to demonstrate the importance and relevance of cuneiform culture to world history by integrating the strange with the familiar. With this in mind, we chose the image for the jacket and frontispiece. It shows a composite creature, half man, half fish, known in ancient times as an *apkallu*, 'sage'. The Akkadian term is a loanword from Sumerian *abgal*, literally 'big fish'. The cover image, which is also reproduced on the frontispiece, is based on the 9th-century BC Assyrian *apkallu* carved on the stone decoration of Ninurta's temple in Kalhu, modern Nimrud (Layard 1853: pl. 6). Its creator, Tessa Rickards, brings it to life by using the colour scheme of the wall paintings adorning the 8th-century BC Assyrian palace of Til Barsip (modern Tell Ahmar). A similar fish-creature was depicted in room XXVII of the Til Barsip palace, close to the throne room, but is preserved only in fragments (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936: pl. LIIIb). The Kalhu *apkallu* was certainly also painted in antiquity, perhaps in a very similar way to the artist's reconstruction. According to Mesopotamian tradition, these 'big fish' are the companions of the god of wisdom, Enki/Ea, who dwells in the depths of the sea. They regularly emerged from the sea in order to teach mankind the cornerstones of civilization, such as agriculture, kingship, justice, and writing, before the Flood ended their coexistence (see van Koppen in this volume). From the third millennium BC to the Hellenistic period (see De Breucker in this volume), the fish-creatures were seen as purveyors of wisdom and learnedness (Reiner 1961; Greenfield 1999). Scholars and priests took

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their title and dressed in their image, wearing robes and hats made out of the skin of the enormous river carps that still populate the Euphrates and Tigris today. To us, these fish-creatures are icons of cuneiform culture.

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PART I

MATERIALITY AND LITERACIES

Literacy has been a fashionable subject for academic research in recent years, especially among sociologists and historians (e.g. Street 1984; 1993; Olson and Torrance 2001; a more exhaustive list in Werner 2009: 340–341). But many of those studies are predicated on several assumptions that do not hold for the ancient Middle East: that literacy is alphabetic, environmentally if not educationally ubiquitous, and involves numeracy only at the margins. What did it mean to be literate and numerate in an environment that was not covered in writing, a world which it was possible to inhabit—especially outside the cities—without ever coming into contact with the written word, a world in which the slow, complex induction into the arts of writing entailed indoctrination into a self-conscious community of literati and numerati who wielded significant political, social, and intellectual power? Our view of ancient Mesopotamia is inevitably constructed through the eyes and words of the literate few. It is futile to pretend we can ever access what 'the Mesopotamians' as a whole did or said or thought: we know only of the unusual minority who had some access to, if not control over, the documentation that has survived the millennia.

However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that it was not only professional, male scribes who could read and write cuneiform: as Niek Veldhuis and Brigitte Lion show in Chapters 4 and 5, there were different levels of cuneiform literacy, and different ways to engage with it, for men and women alike. Later in the book, Michael Jursa explores the functions of cuneiform within Neo-Babylonian temple communities in Chapter 9, while in Chapter 13 Michel Tanret looks at the professional, familial, and sentimental meanings of writing for a single individual in 17th-century Sippar. Indeed most chapters

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address questions of cuneiform literacy in one way or another; it would be otiose to single out more of them.

A distinguishing feature of cuneiform culture is that was essentially, fundamentally numerate (cf. Robson 2008): as Robert Englund shows in Chapter 2, the world's earliest written records are accounts of temple assets—land, labour, livestock, offerings—drawn up at the end of the fourth millennium BC, along with exercises in writing and calculating the necessary personnel and commodities. Over the course of several centuries cuneiform writing began to adapt itself for other purposes, but quantification remained one of its central functions. In Chapter 3, Grégory Chambon considers ways in which to analyse ancient uses of numbers and measures without inadvertently imposing anachronistic concepts of accuracy and standardization on them.

Cuneiform culture was peculiar by world standards in another way: for the medium it favoured and thus the sheer abundance of primary written evidence at our disposal. We may sometimes despair at the huge gaps in the historical record, the fragmentary state of our sources, and the frustratingly allusive ways in which the ancients expressed themselves, but in many ways Assyriologists have it lucky compared to historians of other ancient cultures. That abundance is the direct outcome of the fact that much of the time, cuneiform script was written on clay and other relatively imperishable media, as Jonathan Taylor explores in Chapter 1. The materiality of clay fundamentally shaped cuneiform culture, enabling tamper-proof preservation of the written word but discouraging lengthy writings or documentation that required frequent updating. By a careful study of excavation spots and tablet formats, Steve Tinney in Chapter 27 differentiates a variety of reasons for textual production in the Old Babylonian period, a variety which is not apparent when the sources are treated as disembodied text.

To compensate for the deficiencies of clay tablets, writing boards (Akkadian *lē'u*) with erasable waxed surfaces were used alongside them from at least the 21st century BC (Steinkeller 2004), plus papyrus (Akkadian *niāru*) from the mid-second millennium and parchment or leather rolls (Akkadian *giṭṭu, magallatu*) from the early first millennium onwards (see Philippe Clancier in Chapter 35). Practically no such artefacts survive—apart from a few now surfaceless Neo-Assyrian writing boards—although they are occasionally mentioned in tablets and sometimes depicted visually (Figure 1.8). We must never forget that cuneiform culture was only one literate culture amongst several in the ancient Near East, albeit the most longlived and prestigious.

Further reading

This book is not particularly about the languages of cuneiform culture—primarily the linguistic isolate Sumerian and the Semitic Akkadian—and nor does it assume that readers are especially familiar with them. Robson and Radner's (2009) simple online introduction to the Akkadian language in cuneiform script gives references to further reading. There are also several useful recent collections that discuss Sumerian, Akkadian and cuneiform alongside other ancient literate cultures: Houston (2004) is on the births of ancient scripts while Baines,

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Bennet, and Houston (2008) is about their deaths. Woodard (2008) gives detailed linguistic descriptions of the ancient languages of the Middle East, while a broader take on ancient literacy in the region is given in Sanders (2006). The standard textbooks on the history of the area—neither of which pay much attention to the topics discussed in this volume—are Kuhrt (1995) and Van de Mieroop (2007).

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CHAPTER 1

TABLETS AS ARTEFACTS, SCRIBES AS ARTISANS

JONATHAN TAYLOR

To the untrained eye, each clay tablet inscribed with cuneiform writing tends to look much like every other. To an Assyriologist, however, the physical appearance of a tablet can reveal many layers of information about the inscription and the context of its production; the physical characteristics of tablets correlate strongly with their date and function. Tablets are also susceptible to scientific analyses of the clays and their composition. Following on from studies by Glasmacher et al. (2001), Blackman (2003), Goren et al. (2004), and D'Agostino et al. (2004), a team lead by Chikako Watanabe has begun a range of analyses to investigate tablet clays, their inclusions, and their micro-fauna and -flora, with an eye to provenance and palaeo-climate.

This chapter seeks to capture some major trends in the study of tablets as artefacts, and provides examples from the collections of the British Museum. It therefore concentrates on Mesopotamian cuneiform. Where object numbers are quoted, images and further information are available in the online collections catalogue: www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx. The physicality of a tablet cannot be studied entirely in isolation from other features such as orthography, vocabulary, formulary, palaeography, etc. The study of tablets as artefacts has a long but fitful history. Many questions have yet to be formulated, let alone answered.

The nature of clay

As Rice (1987) explains, the key characteristic of the clay used to form tablets is plasticity. Water is added such that it becomes possible to give clay a form that it will retain, meaning here both the general shape of the tablet and the wedges impressed into the surface to form the inscription. Clay naturally contains water that is chemically combined or occurs between the layers of clay molecules. The water added to achieve plasticity is only

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mechanically combined ('physiorbed'), thus weakly bound to the surfaces of clay particles; the water forms a thin film around the clay particles, acting as a lubricant to allow the clay platelets to slide over one another. This adsorbed water is easily lost at low temperatures (drying in air, for example), causing the clay to lose its plasticity; adding further water will restore plasticity.

Up to a point, the more water in the clay, the greater its plasticity. Finer particles give clay greater plasticity than coarser, in part because the higher number of clay platelets provides a larger surface area. Finer clays have a higher capillary volume than coarse clays, so need more water to develop plasticity.

On drying, the water films around the clay platelets evaporate and the surface tension of the remaining water draws the platelets together. This reduces plasticity and shrinks the volume of the tablet, causing physical stresses. When this 'shrinkage water', or 'film water', is lost, the clay is termed 'leather hard'. 'Pore water' (the remaining physiorbed water) is lost more slowly because it moves through small pores. Finer clays contain more pore water because they have a larger total pore structure; although their individual pores are smaller than those in coarser clays, there are many more of them. The loss of pore water does not cause further shrinkage, since it does not surround the clay platelets and is simply replaced by air. Finer clays may crack and warp, as water is resupplied from the interior more slowly than it is lost at the surface.

Not all parts of a tablet will dry and shrink equally. An area that contains more water (such as one repeatedly smoothed during forming) will shrink more. Particle orientation also influences differential shrinkage, as shrinkage is greatest perpendicular to the orientation of clay platelets. This is due to differing volumes of water films versus clay particles in each linear dimension and variable densities of particle packing. Stroking will cause particles to align perpendicularly to the forming pressure. Where the orientation of clay platelets changes sharply—at corners, seams, and angles—differential shrinkage can occur, causing cracking and warping. Resistance to shrinkage is a factor of 'green strength', that of dry but unfired clay. Finer clays have a higher green strength than coarser clays.

Clay will shrink less if grains are spherical (abraded through transportation in a river, for example), uniform, and closely packed; this makes for a weak body, however. An abundance of platy, flat inclusions such as micas or chlorites leads to lamination (where the clay splits into layers). A good clay thus has a range of inclusion sizes. Adding tempers such as chaff can slow drying and reduce shrinkage. Finally, warmer air can absorb more moisture than cooler air, thus decreasing drying time.

Thickett and Odlyha's (1999) results suggest that tablet clay is almost entirely a silt, magnesium alumino-silicate (probably palygorskite), which by a modern potter's standards would be considered poor quality clay. Scribes would process the clay to remove large stones and vegetation that could hinder the inscription. An unpublished report records how tablet clay from Old Babylonian Tell ed-Der was levigated to a stage where inclusions were < 0.01 mm, but unsoaked fragments up to 3 mm remained. A range of inclusions can be seen even in the library tablets from 7th-century Nineveh. Most common is the presence of small stones, particularly abundant in tablets from

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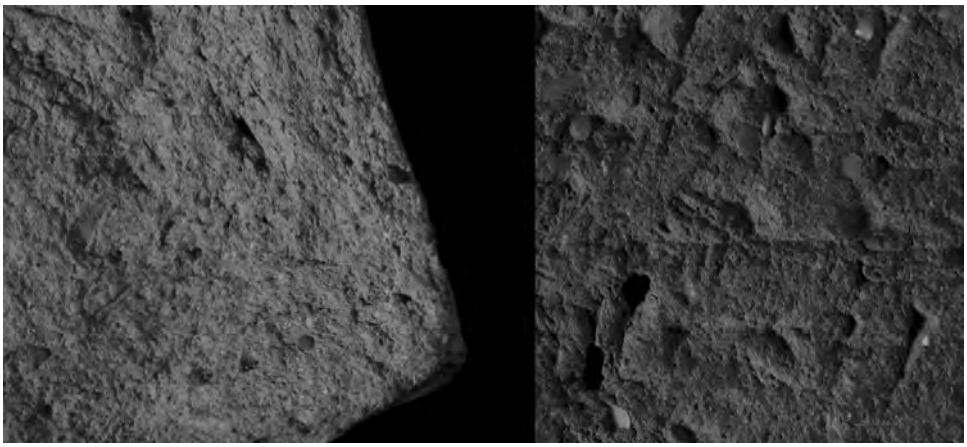

FIGURE 1.1 Clay tablets containing different inclusions: (*left*) stones in the matrix of a tablet from Nuzi (BM 26211); (*right*) shells in the matrix of a tablet from Canaan found at Tell el-Amarna (British Museum, ME 29833). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

Nuzi, for example (see Figure 1.1). Some Neo-Babylonian administrative texts seem to have stone fragments deliberately added. Snail shells also occur sporadically in the record, and in significant numbers in the Amarna letters from the Canaanite ruler Šub-Andu (see Figure 1.1). Neo-Babylonian school tablets can be full of stones and shells, indicating insufficient levigation. Inclusions are also potentially useful sources of information on the local environment. Some categories of text vehicle reveal the presence of chaff. This is found particularly in bricks, but also in Neo-Assyrian prisms (see below), where it helped to provide strength for these large objects. Visual survey makes it clear that scribes used varying qualities of clay for different tablets, according to place, genre, and other factors. This is only to be expected; it is parallel to the different qualities of paper in use today. Scribes would have been expert clay-handlers who knew where to find the right clay and how to work with it to achieve the desired results.

Making a tablet

Old Babylonian Susa yielded 10–12 cm long cylinders of prepared clay (Gasche and de Meyer 2006: 369), handy sources of tablet clay; analysis revealed that the cylinders and local tablets were made of similar clay (Gasche 1973: 54 n. 8). Beyer (1983: 50) refers to lumps of clay found at Mari that could have had the same purpose. British Museum objects 1847–6–23,14 and 1847–6–23,15 (which arrived in a shipment containing sculptures from Neo-Assyrian Nimrud) could be interpreted similarly, as suggested to me by Christopher Walker.

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Processed clay would be kneaded to fully mix wet and dry portions and to remove air pockets. The majority of tablets give the impression that they are carefully made and inscribed. This is surprisingly difficult, and scribes must have learned how to do it properly during their training. We can expect techniques to have varied. Very little work has been done on the basic questions of how tablets were made, and how this changed from one region to the next, over time or according to the intended function of the object inscribed.

Most tablets fit in the palm of the hand, but much larger or smaller tablets were sometimes produced; the smallest can be less than 2 cm square and only a few millimetres thick, while the largest can be 30–40 cm square and 4–8 cm thick. Generally speaking, tablets fall into a limited number of groups, with the shape of each group reflecting the nature of the text, date and place of production. Tablet size usually depends on the quantity of text to be inscribed, but often a particular type of text will be of more or less standard length, and thus tablets of more or less standard size. This is not to deny the great skill of scribes who were experienced in estimating space. There is evidence from several contexts of tablets being produced at the standard size, despite their inscription being rather shorter than normal. Standardized tablet formats and predictable document lengths offer the potential for prefabricating a stock of blank tablets. Few blanks are known, but the existence of many more may safely be inferred. Zettler (1977: 37) records sealed, uninscribed tablets from Old Akkadian Tello, parallels to which include the unsealed Old Akkadian tablet BM 86353, as well as Ur III (BM 23688, sealed; further Zettler 1987: 209), Old Babylonian Nippur (Hilprecht 1903: 524–525), Mari (Charpin 2002: Fig. 6), Sippar (Al-Rawi and Dalley 2000: nos. 3, 49, 50), and several Neo-Babylonian examples (BM 62892). Such blanks open the possibility that someone other than the scribe could make the tablets, but that has yet to be documented. Standardized tablet formats were not universally implemented. The Late Babylonian tablets assembled by Zadok (2005), for example, illustrate the variety that can exist even within one group.

Some shapes are highly distinctive and are easily recognizable. Most tablets are basically rectangular and require more detailed analysis. Unfortunately, it can often be difficult to communicate clearly in words the kinds of feature that are instantly recognized by the experienced eye. The images in Figure 1.2 offer a pictorial overview of some of the common types of tablet from each period of Mesopotamian history. A comprehensive account of the size, shape, format, and features of cuneiform tablets does not yet

FIGURE 1.2A A sample of the variety of shapes and sizes of clay documents. (*Top*) Archaic: administrative (BM 128826); Early Dynastic: administrative (BM 15829, BM 29996, BM 102081); Old Akkadian: administrative (BM 86281, BM 86289, BM 86332); Ur III: administrative (BM 24964), cone (BM 19528). (*Middle*) Ur III: administrative (BM 19525, BM 104650, BM 13059, BM 19176, BM 26972, BM 26950, BM 110116). (*Bottom*) Old Babylonian: administrative (BM 16825), letter (BM 23145), administrative (BM 87373), scholarly (UET 6/3 64, on loan to the British Museum); Old Assyrian: administrative (BM 120548). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

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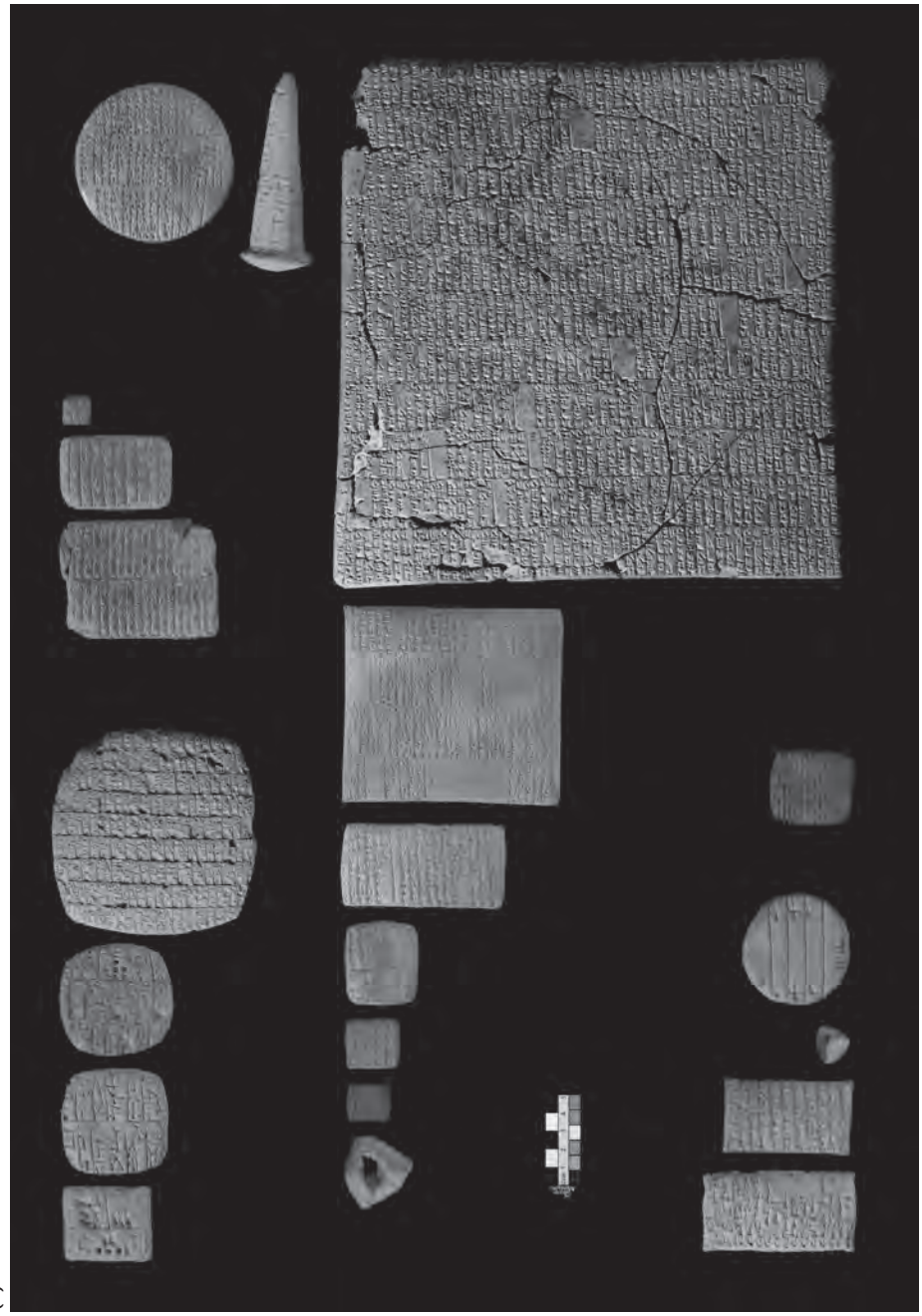

(a)

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exist, but the following are useful overviews of the material from particular periods: Postgate (1986) for Middle Assyrian, Radner (1995) for Neo-Assyrian, and Jursa (2005) for Neo-Babylonian. Eidem (2002) offers a more focused look at some Old Babylonian letters.

Visual inspection can reveal aspects of manufacture. A caveat here is that well-made tablets will appear to be solid lumps of clay, without air pockets or layers. This does not necessarily mean that layers are absent, as amply illustrated by envelopes where the folds are visible at some points but not others. In some cases, fingerprints can be seen on the surfaces of the internal folds within tablets (K 10678).

The most basic technique used to manufacture tablets sees a simple lump of clay hand-moulded into a rough shape, perhaps because the scribe lacked the training or the requisite time and facilities. This technique seems to result in rather crude-looking tablets with uneven profiles, such as some school tablets (UET 6/3 64) or late Babylonian horoscopes (BM 38104). Some smaller tablets could also be made by this method, but would have required effort to finish to a sufficiently high standard. Other tablets, particularly ones too large to fit in the hand, show signs of kneading or rolling against a hard surface. Very often folds of clay are visible. Sumerian school texts refer to the existence of a wooden 'tablet-maker', (Sumerian ^{giš}dub-dim$_2$, Akkadian *dubdimmu*). The word is closely related to one referring to a type of pole (see Sallaberger 1996: 16 n. 68), so perhaps this is a rolling pin.

A more complicated construction whereby an outer sheet was wrapped around a core is visible in many tablets of various sizes, across the range of periods, sites, and genres. From this we may reasonably hypothesize that a complex folding construction was standard practice in Mesopotamia. Biggs (1974: 22–23) observed that typical Abu Salabikh tablets already consist of a 1.4 cm layer of very fine clay wrapped around an irregular core, in apparent contrast to Fara tablets.

The question arises as to how the core itself is formed. It seems unlikely that old tablets would be sheathed in a layer of fresh clay to form new tablets, since the layers would not bond well, few iterations could occur before the tablet became too large, and where the outer layer is broken away so that the surface of the inner core is visible, that surface seems always to be uninscribed. BM 26783 (see Figure 1.3) reveals a more plausible process: a strip of clay was folded almost in half, with a flap holding the folds together; the outer layer was then folded over this core, perpendicular to it. This is perhaps to give the tablet extra strength.

FIGURE 1.2B A sample of the variety of shapes and sizes of clay documents (cont.). (*Top*) Nuzi: administrative (BM 17616, BM 26280); Amarna letters (British Museum, ME 29883, ME 29785); Middle Babylonian: administrative (BM 17689, BM 17673, BM 17626). (*Left*) Neo-Assyrian: prism (BM 91032), scholarly (British Museum, K 750), letter (British Museum, K 469), administrative (British Museum, K 309a), scholarly (British Museum, K 159, K 195, K 4375, K 2811). (*Right*) Neo-/Late Babylonian: barrel (BM 91142, BM 91105), administrative (BM 29589), scholarly (BM 92693), administrative (BM 30912, BM 30690), scholarly (BM 38104, BM 34580). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

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FIGURE 1.3 The folds in a tablet (BM 26783), showing the method of manufacture. (© Trustees of the British Museum)

In the light of the above information, we might tentatively translate anew the only published account from Mesopotamian sources of how to make tablets, an Old Babylonian bilingual school exercise (Civil 1998; ETCSL 5.1.a):

> [Qu]ick, come here, take the clay,
> knead it, flatten it,
> [calc]ulate (the amount needed), fold it (over itself),
> reinforce the core, form (the tablet),
> […] plan it, […]
> hurry, […]
> lift up the flap-clay, trim it off!

The inner core of BM 110193 has a thin crust of clay produced by dampening with water; this was perhaps intended to act as a bonding layer. Sometimes the core is made of a different clay from the outer skin (clearly shown in BM 51224). In general, however, most tablets seem to be made from one clay. A further refinement to the layering techniques is that of applying slips—pastes of diluted clay—to improve the visual appeal of the finished tablet. Use of slips is particularly evident in Middle Assyrian and scholarly Neo-Babylonian tablets.

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Writing a tablet

When writing on moist clay, it is almost inevitable that the scribe will leave fingerprints. While a properly finished tablet does not show many fingerprints, some partial prints do remain, often on the corners. It has been suggested that systematic study of these prints could help reconstruct archives or possibly how a tablet was held (D'Agostino et al. 2004: 113–114).

Tablets were written with a specialist writing instrument, now called a stylus. Its ancient name, 'tablet reed', betrays the origins of the tool. Over time other materials were added to the stylus-making repertoire: wood, ivory, bone, and metal. In the early days of writing, a combination of impressing and incising was used, leaving wedge-shaped marks and curved lines. The curved lines are gradually replaced by impressed wedges, and the script assumes a more abstract appearance. Speed and ease of writing and the greater visibility of wedges with larger heads (thus, impressed) may be among the reasons for this transition. The commonly offered suggestion that accidental smudging of text by scribes as they wrote from right to left played a role is disproved by the lack of such smudging on the tablets, and indeed on numerous later tablets where columns were written from right to left.

The shape of styli has been the subject of prolonged debate, with suggestions ranging from square to triangular (Driver 1976: 18–31). Marzahn (2003) offers evidence for some styli being cut from a round reed, rather than Saggs's (1981) triangular sedge. It is worth noting that the triangular shape of the impressions does not necessarily imply a triangular stylus-end; pressing a square-ended stylus into the clay at an angle produces wedge-shaped impressions. Incidental holes made by styli tend to be round. The bone styli found at Tell ed-Der (Gasche 1989: 102 pl. 45; cf. Boehmer 1972: 196–197) are roughly square in section, with bevelled ends; they are too short (max. 5.5 cm) to have made the longer rulings found on many tablets. Might they be training styli? The angle between the head and tail of a wedge can vary from 90 to 45 degrees. Clay's (1906: 20) observation that this angle correlates very strongly with that of the corner-wedge suggests that the latter was made by simple impression, without a flick of the wrist. The other end of the stylus, or perhaps another stylus altogether (as in Early Dynastic texts, where there are both large and small number marks as well as wedges), was round-ended. This was used to write numbers as late as the Ur III period. Styli had limited lifetimes and were apt to split at the end, leaving double impressions with each stroke in the clay (BM 13038). Much about styli and other scribal equipment remains unclear.

It is commonly the general shape of a cuneiform sign that is key to its identity, rather than the exact number and placement of its component wedges. Some wedges are key to giving the sign its general shape, while others are less important and may vary without changing the meaning. In some late scripts, however, groups of very similar-looking signs are used, and minor changes in the number or placement of wedges can signal the difference between one sign and another. The specifics of sign composition could

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potentially be used to identify scribal schools, if not individuals. It is further possible that the order in which wedges are written could be key to how signs are formed. This is very difficult to discover, however, as deeper wedges give the appearance of having been written before shallower ones (Livingstone et al. 2004). The solution to this problem may lie in the displacement of clay distorting previously written wedges.

The whole wedge can itself be impressed at a variety of angles. For most of cuneiform, the wedges are arranged in an arc that is comfortable for a right-handed person. In earlier periods and in monumental scripts that imitate archaic forms, wedges can be found in other alignments. The entire script can lean to the left, as in Late Babylonian tablets, or even to the right, as in Old Assyrian tablets.

Cuneiform signs are usually written in such a way that they connect with their horizontal and vertical neighbours, giving the script a feeling of coherence. Signs are spaced out to fill the line. When there is insufficient space to complete a line, the text flows onto the right edge and sometimes even the opposite side of the tablet. Another solution is to run on into the next physical line, inset and occasionally in a smaller font.

Cuneiform characters came to be read at 90 degrees to their pictorial origins, but the timing and reasons for this change are much disputed. Marzahn (2003) hypothesizes variable writing and reading direction in archaic Uruk. It is also worth stressing that the way in which tablets are stored or labels hang does not necessarily demonstrate reading orientation, since we are ignorant of scribal practice—were such inscriptions read from a position face on or sideways, and would a scribe pull a tablet straight out or pivot it down on a corner? The flow of writing may be a factor in any change, given the original right-facing nature of the script and the possible implications of that for wedge order.

Cuneiform script could be written parallel to the short edge of the tablet (portrait orientation) or to the long edge (landscape). But almost all tablets turn along the horizontal axis rather than the vertical (as do modern books). This must be related to the fact that tablets are individual sheets of writing material, held in the hand, with deep edges, so that text can flow uninterrupted around the object. Where there are several columns, they run from left to right on the obverse, right to left on the reverse; the columns on the reverse of some Old Babylonian and Neo-Babylonian exercise tablets run from left to right. Indeed, exceptions to the rules about turning direction are seen most often in the work of younger students who have yet to perfect the turning habit. The Graeco-Babyloniaca tablets (see below) frequently turn around the vertical axis. Other exceptions can be found occasionally in administrative documentation, too: Lion and Stein (2001: no. 38) from Nuzi and several Neo-Babylonian and Late Babylonian administrative and legal texts. These can probably be explained as oversights. Other examples are clearly deliberate: the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon, magnificent state documents, turn like a book and the columns on the reverse run from left to right (Wiseman 1958: 14). The same phenomena are observable in the monumental East India House Inscription of Nebuchadnezzar (BM 129397) and its duplicate (Wallenfels 2008). Other categories of exception include: a royal inscription from Lagaš where each column is read on both obverse and reverse, before moving to the next pair of columns; rectangular Middle Babylonian school tablets where the obverse is read in portrait, while the reverse is read

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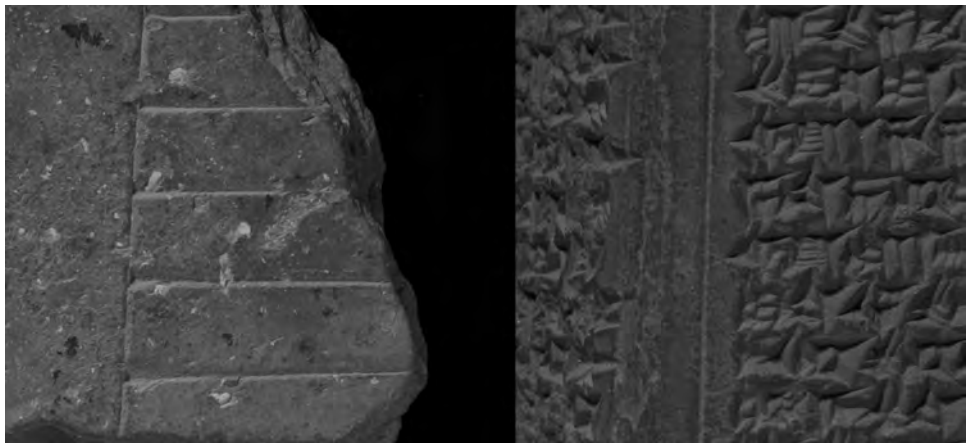

FIGURE 1.4 Rulings made on clay tablets by a stylus (*left*: BM 12451), and by string (*right*: British Museum, Sm 1026). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

in landscape; Neo-Babylonian barrel cylinders with hymns to Nabu, where the two columns are oriented upside down to each other (BM 42768, BM 95480); some Late Babylonian scholarly tablets; plus individual specimens such as Neo-Babylonian administrative tablet BM 49643.

Tablets and other text vehicles are routinely ruled in a variety of ways: to provide guidelines, indicate text lines (earlier forming text 'cases', where signs were clustered into sense units) and columns or mark divisions within a text. The rulings are made with a stylus, and often the head of what is effectively a very long wedge is visible. Rulings and their relation to the text can be revealing. Sometimes rulings are made with string instead of a stylus (see Figure 1.4); this is most common in borders of Neo-Assyrian prisms (see below), where it provided a neater look to these long lines.

Right from the earliest days, tablets could be impressed with seals, which were used as a form of identity or authority marker. They could certify the receipt of goods or the assumption of an obligation, or act like a signature. There was enormous variety not only in the designs of seals, but also in the sealing practices—who sealed, when, where, and how many times. Sealings are thus extremely informative. From the Old Babylonian period onwards, finger-nail impressions could serve as a seal substitute. Usually three nail-marks are made in a group, as many as five in Neo-Assyrian texts or seven in Middle Babylonian, or as few as one in Seleucid texts (see Figure 1.5). In Neo-Babylonian texts artificial nail-marks can be found; by the Hellenistic period they disappear from use. The arrangement of nail impressions varies widely. Hems were also sometimes impressed in lieu of seals (see Figure 1.5). Other textile impressions are accidentally made. Hems (and nails) have wider symbolic usage. Rarely pearls (ND 2346) or shells (K 313) were used as seal substitutes (Herbordt 1992: 41–42).

Some first-millennium scholarly tablets are marked with what are traditionally called 'firing holes' (see Figure 1.6), usually round but occasionally square, triangular, or even

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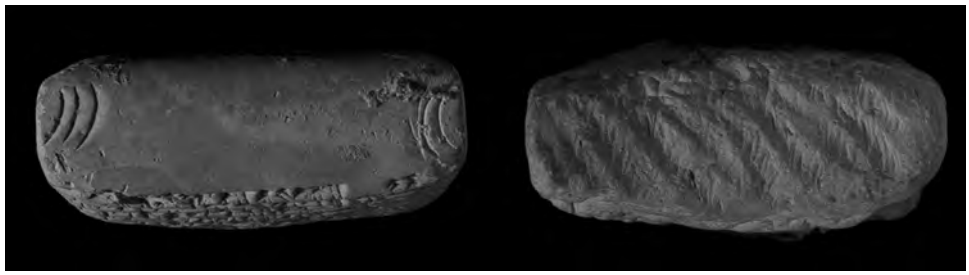

FIGURE 1.5 Nail impressions on a Neo-Babylonian tablet (*left*: BM 85239), and a hem impression on an Old Babylonian tablet (*right*: BM 81023). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

almond-shaped. The name is based on the idea that they were made to prevent the tablet exploding during the baking process. Only rarely in antiquity were tablets baked. A handful of Neo-Babylonian colophons and documents attest the practice. The vast majority of tablets in more recent history were baked; from the mid-19th century onwards it has been common practice for dealers, excavators, and museums to bake tablets to protect them from damage. An alternative theory holds that the 'firing' holes were originally employed to prevent alteration of the text by filling blank spaces on the tablet (Jeyes 2000: 371). There are many cases of tablets where holes are made in some but not all spaces, or where holes are found in places where no additional writing could have been placed. While their function remains elusive, their placement is not entirely random.

Steinkeller (2004: 68) formulates two arguments about Ur III administrative texts that have profound implications across cuneiform: firstly that such texts were written some time after, and in a setting different from, the transaction they describe; and secondly that such texts present a special, bureaucratically meaningful version of events, rather than an accurate account of what actually happened. It is clear that scribes did not always write a tablet from beginning to end in a single moment. We should imagine a situation where tablets were kept damp until considered finished. This was not always successfully achieved. The final column of BM 23687 was written after the clay had started to harden. In BM 19176 the upper lines on the reverse were written not only after the obverse but also after the last lines of the reverse. Other parallels exist; Gebhard Selz (pers. comm.) refers to a tablet that lacks a total, suggesting several stages in the writing process. Krebernik et al. (2005: 48) document the use of a vertical wedge of deletion, written with a different stylus from the original text, and refer to the later addition of lines. Clay (1906: 16) uses check-marks to deduce that lists were written by first copying the names of people from a prior list, then noting which were dead or runaways, then the amounts and marks to show when these have been paid out.

In the round Ur III field survey tablets the yields are sometimes written in after the clay had started to dry (Maekawa 1982: 101). In other cases the yields are not written in at all; another solution must have been found. Assurbanipal's Library contains examples of a colophon being written after the clay had started to dry (K 251), and in a couple of occasions even written in ink after the tablet had fully dried (K 10100, DT 273). Wax-filled

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FIGURE 1.6 'Firing holes' in a Neo-Assyrian scholarly tablet (British Museum, K 39). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

writing boards (see below) were more amenable to delayed inscription, so would be sealed to prevent alteration of the text (MacGinnis 2002: 222–223).

Given the proficiency with which the few surviving inked cuneiform inscriptions are written (see above, plus further examples from Assur and Hattusa), we are entitled to speculate as to what other use was made of ink for cuneiform. We know of other uses from Old Babylonian period Mari (Charpin 1984). Some tablets are cancelled with red ink (paralleled by physical crossing out attested in late Old Babylonian Sippar and Larsa, e.g. BM 80161), indicating that the transaction has been completed but a record of it was still required. In other cases marks were struck through individual lines in a list of workers, eliminating them from the team. This use of paint on tablets is now further attested at Tell Bi'a on the Syrian Euphrates (Durand and Marti 2004: 132). The Egyptian scribes at Amarna wrote on tablets in ink, sometimes archival notes on letters, sometimes red or black dots on school tablets, interpreted by Izre'el (1997: 46–47) as marking metreme boundaries. A rare reference in a scribal colophon to omens written on parchment (see further Garelli 1978) opens up the possibilities of much wider use of ink for writing cuneiform in the late periods.

Some first-millennium texts contain Aramaic notes (inked on or incised with a reed pen, occasionally both) added to cuneiform texts, or consist solely of incised Aramaic

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letters. The Aramaic notes are often written upside down in relation to the cuneiform text. It would be curious had they been so written by the cuneiform scribe (who would plausibly have been able to write Aramaic), but also curious had an Aramaic scribe chosen to incise rather than ink the inscription. Incised Aramaic perhaps consciously mimics the impressed character of the traditional cuneiform script. Interestingly, several tablets contain similarly incised characters of an as yet unidentified script, proposed but rejected as a form of Indian script (Falk 1993: 117–119). During the late period, cuneiform began to give way to Aramaic and Greek documents written on parchment (see further Clancier 2005). A remarkable group of tablets known as the Graeco-Babyloniaca (see most recently Westenholz 2007) show Greek-speakers learning cuneiform. These tablets contain traditional school texts on the obverse, with transliteration into Greek letters on the reverse.

Several categories of notation were used beyond the basic inscriptions and scribal colophons. Administrative lists can be marked with rectangular, semi-circular, or circular check-marks. In Early Dynastic texts the cross-shaped cuneiform signs KUR_2 or PAP could be used to show unexecuted transactions (G. Selz, pers. comm.). In some school texts and occasionally in administrative lists a line count can be found; this takes the form of a '10' mark in the margins at every tenth line. School texts can also contain the cross-shaped signs BAD or NU to indicate an error made by a learner pupil. School texts can use a special gloss-marker (Krecher 1971: 433). In Neo-Babylonian barrels this or a vertical wedge can be used to mark off text that runs over into the next column. Old Assyrian texts make occasional use of a vertical wedge as word divider; this often seems to be an indicator of non-professional scribes (Larsen 2002: xl–xli). Lambert (1978: 76) records a kind of acrostic written around the edges of cylinders containing hymns to Nabu.

A much neglected aspect of scribal practice is that of making drawings on tablets. Among the earliest uses of drawings are the designs used instead of seal impressions in archaic Ur (1930–12–13, 410). The most spectacular drawings, however, can be found on the reverse of school tablets from Abu Salabikh (Biggs 1974); the function of these elaborate designs remains unclear. Plans of fields and buildings (Heisel 1993: 7–75), and mathematical diagrams (Robson 2008: 60–67) appear during the late third millennium, and continue into the first millennium. They tend to be relatively simple line drawings with labels. From the Old Babylonian period we find diagrams illustrating viscera, incantations (BM 92669, BM 92670; cf. the sage on the Late Babylonian medical text BM 40183), and drawings of a teacher. There are also maps (Millard 1987) of cities or the world (BM 92687). Neo- and Late Babylonian administrative texts can sometimes carry scored lines (Baker 2003: 245), archaic signs (BM 29342), or drawings such as birds (BM 22357), fish (BM 46874), geometric shapes (BM 29363), or other designs (BM 83400) on their reverse, or less commonly the left edge.

Drawn not with the regular stylus but with a combination of pointed tool and fingernails, such drawings appear to constitute archival marks, some referring to the content of the accompanying text (Zawadzki and Jursa 2001; Janković 2004: 193–194). Similar types of drawing are found on tablets from the Old and Middle Babylonian periods; in the former case, the drawings often refer to the deities who are creditors of silver loans.

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First-millennium tablets also yield illustrations of divine standards (BM 33055) or parts of the liver (K 2090) or the skies (Sm 162).

Other examples demonstrate the considerable success with which it is possible to draw on clay: the lion attacking a boar from Babylon (Jakob-Rost et al. 1992: no. 51), composite creature from Kabnak (modern Haft Tepe) in Elam (Negahban 1994: Fig. 14), or the hand-modelled copy of the royal seal on BM 77612 (Da Riva and Frahm 1999/2000: 166–169), which displays incredible mastery of the clay. These drawings are made without excessive build-up of clay. The same can be said for the incised characters of archaic script. Equipment and technique were clearly important. Furthermore, this observation contradicts the widespread assumption that curved lines fall out of use on account of the build-up of clay in front of the stylus.

While erasures are far from rare, the general impression is that scribes took sufficient care with inscriptions that relatively little use was made of erasure; this is perhaps connected to the feature that invisible erasure seems to be very difficult. Rare markings seem to indicate text due for erasure (Reisner 1896: xiv–xv; Schroeder 1920: no. 1).

A special type of erasure is that of 'excision of acquittance', identified by Joachim Marzahn in texts from Early Dynastic Lagaš (pers. comm.). Individual transactions within a document are deliberately erased for one of a variety of reasons, including to mark amounts paid back or items not yet delivered. A similar interpretation has been offered for tablets which have the upper left corner missing, perhaps broken off to indicate the completion of a particular stage in the administrative process (a phenomenon clearly attested at archaic Uruk; G. Selz, pers. comm.).

Palimpsests are rare. They are found occasionally in school contexts and have been claimed in the case of some letters from Old Babylonian Šušarra (modern Shemshara, Larsen 1987: 220 n. 51); in this specific circumstance we can imagine that it was easier for the messenger from a foreign city to re-use an old tablet than make one anew. The most common type of Old Babylonian school tablet has erasure and re-inscription built into its function from the start. On the left side a model text is written, to be copied in one or more columns on the right. The copy is later erased and another copy made over it. When the right side of the tablet becomes too thin it can be cut away or refortified with additional layers of clay. Otherwise the addition of clay to tablets is rare, and usually of unclear purpose.

Enveloping

Administrative texts and letters were sometimes covered with an envelope made from a thin strip of clay (see Figure 1.7). In the latter case it might have kept the contents confidential and allowed an identifying seal to be impressed on the outside. Old Assyrian letters can include a second 'page', in the same envelope (BM 113573). Envelopes on administrative tablets protected the text from alteration or damage; physical protection was often enhanced by placing the tablet upside down and back to front, so any damage

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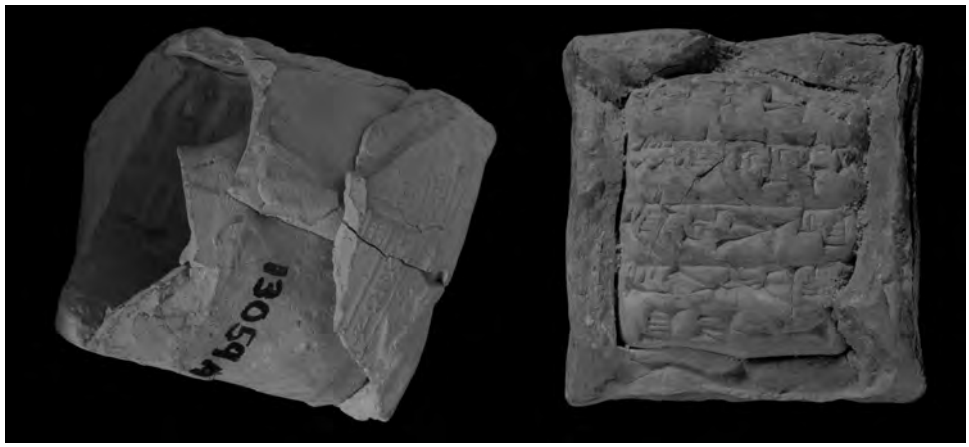

FIGURE 1.7 Fragment of a clay envelope, showing the folds within (*left*: BM 13059a), and a tablet inside its envelope (*right*: BM 22903). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

to the text of the envelope did not also lead to damage to the same part of the text on the tablet (Charpin 2000: 72). Administrative envelopes bore a copy (not always identical), summary, or excerpt of the text they enclose, plus seal impressions or other markers of identity. Practice varied widely; for example, in the early Ur III period the envelope would be sealed on obverse and reverse before inscription, but later in the Ur III period would be inscribed before being sealed all over (Fischer 1997). Uninscribed envelopes are rare (BM 78747, BM 86451).

A common enveloping technique for Ur III tablets lays the tablet towards the end of a strip of clay and folds the sides over the tablet, with the two flaps tapering together in the centre (BM 13022a, BM 13059a; see Figure 1.7). Next the remaining clay was folded over the two flaps. It seems likely that water was used to stick the folds together. Often the internal surfaces of envelopes are marked extensively with fingerprints (BM 110219).

The question arises as to how the envelope did not simply become part of the enclosed tablet mass. Anecdotally, answers have ranged from a hypothesized layer of dust or an ephemeral layer of textile separating the two (perhaps evidenced by BM 22903a, BM 54225a) to the idea that an envelope met the tablet only at the corners. Observation reveals that the inside edges of the envelopes usually bear a positive impression of the whole inscription, including all edges, to such an extent that the text can now easily be read from the inner envelope surfaces. Experimentation suggests that tablet and envelope could have been kept apart by the simple expedient of allowing the tablet to air-dry a little before adding the envelope (already Clay 1906: 9). Alternative practices may have been followed, of course.

Enveloping declines in popularity from the Old Babylonian period, while the practice of producing duplicate tablets increases in popularity. The old technology does not altogether disappear, however, and envelopes are still found around Neo-Assyrian and some Neo-Babylonian letters and administrative texts. An echo of enveloping is hypothesized

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in Late Babylonian contexts, where an inner roll of papyrus is sealed with clay then a duplicate outer roll wrapped around it (Invernizzi 2003).

Re-use and recycling

Clay tablets can easily be re-used: as construction material; as amulets; erased and re-inscribed (common only on a type of Old Babylonian practice tablet); recycled, either by remoulding the clay into new tablets (UET 6/3 621) or by re-levigating into sediment.

It has been observed that documents often survive only from about the last 30 years of an archive's life, and it has been hypothesized that archives only survive at all when suddenly and violently disturbed (see Civil 1987; Millard 2005). Functioning archives are thought to have been gradually 'eaten' from behind, as old tablets are disposed of, perhaps in order to make new tablets.

It is widely assumed that tablet recycling was standard practice in all contexts, but the archaeological evidence for this is currently limited. In which contexts and to what extent did recycling take place? Was it systematic or ad hoc and opportunistic? We might hypothesize that archive clearance occurred sporadically, when the accumulation of documentation became problematic. It is clear that brick-built bin structures or pots functioned as clay stores; these could be semi-permanent in public archives and 'schools', but apparently not in private contexts. These structures do not necessarily imply recycling, however. Raw tablet clay is readily available in limitless quantities, at no cost, requires minimal preparation, and probably is not used in as great quantities as has often been assumed. Tanret (2004) gives an idea of the numbers of tablets produced per day by a scribe operating in a private context (approximately one every few days per customer). We should probably think along roughly similar lines for scribes in institutional contexts. Writing tablets probably consumed only a small proportion of a scribe's day. In addition to carrying out the activities described in, and implied by, the surviving texts, as well as the many more which have not been recovered, he would also have performed numerous activities that were never recorded in clay. Recycling involves unnecessary effort. Students no doubt produced tablets at a much faster rate than administrators, and their products expired almost instantly after completion (and while still more or less damp; see Gesche 2001: 57 for evidence from Neo-Babylonian school tablets). Tablet quality therefore was not of prime concern there. Even in school contexts, students had large quantities of clay on hand, and a large number of tablets have been found in temporary storage or as building hard-core; House F at Nippur is a good example, with as many as 1000 school tablets surviving (Robson 2001: 44). Once a tablet had outlived its usefulness it was just a small lump of surplus clay, in a building and a city made of clay. There is plentiful evidence for tablets having been discarded, in lots or individually, even in contexts where evidence can be found for recycling.

Van Driel (1998: 27 n. 30) records having seen Neo-Babylonian tablets from Sippar where the inner clay contained visible wedges, but unfortunately does not mention

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which tablets; the Sippar material is also a little unusual compared to that from other sites. At Old Babylonian Mari the excavators found a tablet that appeared to have been recycled immediately after having been written; only traces of a personal name survive (Villard 1984: no. 627). Another tablet, this time roughly wrapped in clay, has also been interpreted as being recycled (Charpin 2002: 39 Fig. 6). It is not clear exactly what stage in the process this would represent, or how the tablet came to take this form and remain in it; and moulding new clay around old tablets is an otherwise undocumented practice as yet. Middle Babylonian Haft Tepe yielded a similar object from a context containing many school tablets (Negahban 1994: 40 Fig. 8), and in this case we are probably not dealing with such a process, since the amount of new clay is excessive.

Zettler (1992: 68) highlights what seems to be a huge administrative recycling bin in the Ur III levels of Inana's temple at Nippur, containing clay and thirty-four broken sealings, tags, and the remains of about a dozen crumpled or broken tablets, including at least two school exercises. Both the tablets and the sealings argue for the deposit being made within a short period, within a few years either side of 2038 BC. The very low number of objects (in a bin with a volume of 6.25 m^3) and their shared, very recent dating stand in contradiction to the models that see the gradual attrition or sudden clearing of archives from behind. The short life of these tablets also contradicts the longer lives of other single transaction documents, which in many cases are kept even after being entered into summary documents, and typically survive in huge numbers, dating back decades before the end of archives. This and the presence of stone weights in the bin suggest rather that a small pile of waste objects was thrown into the bin as it was covered over and replaced by a pot of much smaller capacity; the surrounding courtyard also contained waste stone and other materials, as well as tablets.

Scheil (1902: 33–34) describes finding a bin with school tablets being recycled, but little else can be said about this. In early Old Babylonian area SM at Ur, a group of mangled tablets was found (Woolley and Mallowan 1976: 80 n. 1); there was no sign of a clay container, however. Many of these tablets are described as 'perfect'. The remaining tablets included several school tablets, perhaps explaining the recycling. Just outside the building further tablets were found dumped intact. Two installations of asphalt-covered bricks in a scribal family's house in Late Babylonian Uruk have been interpreted as clay-working facilities (Hoh 1979: 28–29, Fig. 10b, pl. 69); quantities of roughly formed fine clay lumps were found there. A brick bench and brick boxes in the Neo-Assyrian archive room of the Northwest Palace in Nimrud, meanwhile, have been interpreted as a filing system (Walker 2008: 258–259). The classic example of recycling is that from the house of a lamentation priest in Old Babylonian Sippar-Amnanum (see Tanret in this volume), where scribal training had been taking place. Subsequent renovations buried the clay bin. From this point on the owner would have had to dispose of his expired documentation another way; it is simplest to assume that he would just have thrown it away, and that this method of disposal would have been common.

At Old Babylonian Susa further evidence of tablet recycling was found (Gasche and de Meyer 2006), different again in nature from those previously discussed. In one building

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were found several deposits of clay mixed with fragments of broken school tablets (some water-damaged) ranging from very basic stylus practice to advanced exercises. This is not a snapshot of one moment in the education of a single scribe. In the street outside was another deposit with clay, much smaller tablet fragments and a few sealings. The building is not domestic, but appears to be a clay-working installation, designed to serve the large adjacent administrative building, and perhaps also the pottery adjacent on the other side. While tablet recycling does seem to have been taking place, it appears to be restricted to school tablets (possibly also sealings), and the overall number of tablets is tiny given the total 400 litres of clay found there. The mixing of tablets and fresh clay raises two obvious questions: why the need for fresh clay and why mix refined tablet clay with unrefined clay? The answer to the first has been that the supply of old clay was insufficient—apparently woefully inadequate. Unless the volume of documentation was increasing rapidly, it would seem that archives were not being slowly recycled from behind; vast quantities of new clay were entering the system. Gasche and de Meyer's (2006) answer to the second builds on the observation that some tablets from Tell ed-Der and Susa, particularly letters, have fine clay layers wrapped around lower quality cores (Gasche and de Meyer 2006: 368); a similar manufacturing technique has been observed in tablets from Mari (Faivre 1995: 58). The suggestion is that such clay would need to be processed so that it could be used for new tablets or their outer layers. Were this so, it would necessarily mean that those original tablets could not have been through the recycling process themselves, and that future tablets would be made either from pure clay alone or with the introduction of much new, unrefined clay. Perhaps it is simply the case that the volume of tablet clay being recycled was too small to make it worth the effort of separating it out.

Other text vehicles

For depictions of scribes we rely on Neo-Assyrian evidence, largely from the relief sculptures of palaces. While objects are depicted accurately, Assyrian composition is formalized and does not yield photo-realistic images. Scribes are shown operating in pairs; one holds a wooden writing board with wax-filled panels, the other holds a pen and writes on a roll of parchment or papyrus. The second scribe is thought to be writing a parallel account in Aramaic—the everyday language of the time—presumably for a different purpose. An alternative hypothesis is that he is a kind of war artist, taking notes on the exotic landscapes to inform the later carving of reliefs celebrating Assyrian victory in that campaign (see Reade 1981: 162). The cuneiform scribe regularly carries a writing board rather than a tablet. From a practical point of view, it would be easier for a scribe on campaign to operate with a writing board than to have to source and process clay in a strange environment, make a proper tablet, and inscribe long lists before the tablet dries. In the Tell Barsip paintings and a few reliefs (e.g. BM 118882; see Figure 1.8), however, the cuneiform scribe holds a tablet; he also holds a stylus as long as those of scribes writing on boards.

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FIGURE 1.8 Two Neo-Assyrian scribes, one holding a clay tablet and the other a leather scroll: detail of a stone relief from Tiglath-pileser III's palace at Kalhu, modern Nimrud, Iraq (BM 118882). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

Apart from tablets of various shapes and sizes, many other objects can be made from clay and inscribed. These range from objects such as roughly life-size clay architectural fittings in the shape of fists (known as 'hands of Ištar'; BM 90976) and vessels carrying royal inscriptions (BM 140889) or labelling the owner or contents (1880–06–17,1932) to teaching models of vital organs, most often livers (BM 92668), but also lungs (Rm 620) or spleen. Most common, however, are royal inscriptions: bricks or building deposits (Ellis 1968). From the Old Akkadian period onwards, some bricks were inscribed with a stamp; handwritten bricks can contain a high proportion of errors. This is the only use to which printing was put in Mesopotamia; presumably it was not deemed appropriate for other inscriptions to be stamped in this way, even when the text was similar to that of the bricks. It is not without interest that the Assyrians had invented what amounts to movable type for this one purpose. Building deposits can take the form of cones, nails,

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prisms, barrels, or cylinders, each displaying a number of sub-types, correlating closely with period and provenance. Prisms and cylinders are further found carrying other types of text, particularly school texts and literature. Unlike the average tablet, building deposits in antiquity were intended to be baked.

As early as the Ur III period scribes could write on wooden or ivory boards (in single, double, or multiple leaves) filled with a mixture of wax and orpiment (or another material; Stol 1998: 347–348; see further MacGinnis 2002). The additive gave the wax plasticity and also a yellowy colour akin to the slips found on some tablets. These boards bore a variety of texts and were used for both temporary and longer-term purposes. Their manufacture was a complicated process and required carpenters (proven by texts from late period Uruk). Tantalizing expressions mention the transfer of data between boards and clay tablets; their precise interaction is unknown (Symington 1991: 116–118).

From the Ur III period clay cones and nails are found, ranging from around 6–12 cm long. Despite close physical resemblance and function, cones and nails are subject to different practices and follow separate developmental paths. During the early Old Babylonian period the heads of nails increase dramatically in size, and start to bear a copy of the inscription. Cones and nails are normally solid. Some bear tell-tale traces of having been twisted from a wheel; the coiled end has not been smoothed (BM 139975). Others have a partial-depth central piercing from the base (BM 102586, BM 138346); they are irregularly cone-shaped. This type appears to have been turned slowly on a spike wheel. Some have been tempered to provide extra strength.

Some cones and nails have a bulge part way down the length of their tail. This may be the inspiration of the barrel cylinders that take over from cones; cylinders are just more symmetrical around the bulge. The symmetry is not perfect. Some barrels are thicker at one end, when viewed from the outside. Internally they are thicker at that end, this being the base upon which the object was turned on the wheel and perhaps on which it was intended to be stood. Barrels vary enormously, in terms of size (from less than 10 cm long to more than 20), structure (solid or hollow; both types can sometimes be pierced longitudinally), and in quality of material used (from very fine clay to heavily tempered clay). Hollow barrels were wheel-thrown using coils; these can have much thicker ends (BM 54506), like hollow prisms. Solid barrels have a surface layer of finer clay over a rough but strong core (BM 51255).

From the Early Dynastic period onwards a wide range of cylinders and prisms was produced, from exceptional pieces such as Gudea's famous cylinders (about 60 cm tall, 30 cm diameter) through more common Old Akkadian–Old Babylonian school texts (much smaller objects ranging from cylinders to prisms of 4, 6, 7, or more sides, holding up to three columns of text per face, and likewise being solid or pierced vertically), to the Middle- and Neo-Assyrian prisms (Borger 1996; these can be 40–50 cm tall) that were the functional equivalents of Neo-Babylonian barrel cylinders.

Neo-Assyrian hollow prisms were made by a complex technique (see Figure 1.9). First came a thick base with a concave upper. On top of this came the body; the internal skin, giving the object its basic form, was made by stacking coils on top of each other and smoothing into a cylindrical vessel. The writing surface was formed by adding a layer of

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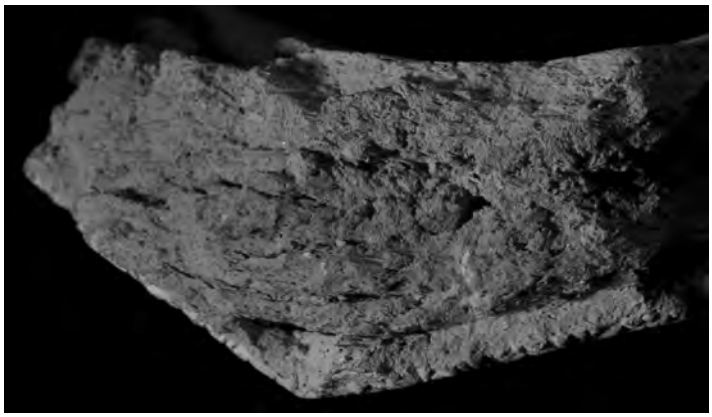

FIGURE 1.9 Fragment of a Neo-Assyrian prism, showing the layers of its construction (BM 128076). (© Trustees of the British Museum)

fine clay. It was this layer that gave the prism its squared sides; a similar phenomenon is found in tablets, where it is the outer layer that gives the tablet its more precise form. The top simply arches into a small central cavity. The mechanism by which the scribe was able to keep the writing surface moist for long enough to inscribe the text remains unclear; perhaps simply a damp cloth was used.

Conclusion

Each of the above sections can be nuanced and greatly expanded—and further sections added on topics such as scribal training or manipulation of script, for example—but I have tried to offer a glimpse into the study of clay tablets as objects with their own story. Some of the features result from the considered expression of highly trained artisans, others are incidental; all have something to tell us about the scribal world. The ready availability of high-quality images of the objects, and a holistic approach integrating study of inscriptions with that of the vehicles of their textual expression open the way to a deeper understanding of cuneiform culture.

Further reading

Rice (1987) is a very useful reference work, explaining clay as a raw material and techniques of working with it. Driver (1976) presents an incisive account of the physicality of writing and its implications. Charpin (2008) gives a lively and well-informed account of cuneiform and clay tablets, ranging from fine details to overarching themes. Edzard (1980) is a detailed and technical introduction to cuneiform writing.

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Brosius (2003) is a collection of papers addressing the use of tablets, with an obvious emphasis on archives. Ellis (1968) gives an overview of foundation deposits—an important category of text vehicles other than tablets—and how they were used. Eidem (2002) uses Old Babylonian as a case study to demonstrate the value of studying tablets as artefacts. A good example of a publication of texts that pays attention to the physical features of tablets and what can be learnt from them is Podany (2002), especially chapters 1 and 6.

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CHAPTER 2

ACCOUNTING IN PROTO-CUNEIFORM

ROBERT K. ENGLUND

Historians of ancient Babylonia are confronted with a myriad of hurdles in their work. First and foremost is the fact that they deal with a long-dead civilization, so that in the absence of informants they must interpret the material remains from Near Eastern excavations as best they can, often with very limited tools.

More daunting is the task for those who want to make sense of the social system that produced the documents from the Late Uruk period. Associates of the Berlin research project *Archaische Texte aus Uruk* (Englund and Nissen 2001: 9–10; Englund 2004: 23 n. 1), to whom I owe most of my understanding of the earliest written records in Mesopotamia, are often forced to oversimplify archaeological and epigraphic data from Uruk and the other late fourth-millennium BC settlements of the Near East, and in a sense to falsify into apparent meaningfulness what remains a disturbingly unclear picture. We may apply to our data the models developed in the social, above all the ethnographic, sciences, yet we should remember that with the onset of urbanization in the mid-fourth millennium BC we are dealing with an historical, developed society in Babylonia; there is a danger of ascribing to this historically distinct period the same ahistorical nature that characterizes most general histories of Mesopotamia (Bernbeck 1999; Englund 2004: 24 n. 2).

Control of the movement of goods and services is a critical element in the economic dimension of social power (Mann 1986). As is clear from a review of the emergence of proto-cuneiform in the latter half of the fourth millennium BC, it was an ever present component of urbanization in the ancient Near East. Michael Hudson (2004) has offered a concise description of most of the salient elements of early accounting in Babylonia, elements that most Assyriologists have considered in working on their specific periods of specialization, and to a lesser degree in terms of general developments in Mesopotamia. Among these are the development of writing itself; a system of calendrical metrology; and systems of quantification and bookkeeping that led to the formation of equivalence values based on the commodity silver.

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Considering the importance of precious metals in most early civilizations, it might seem surprising to learn that we have no clear evidence in the archaic texts of the use of weights, nor any evidence that silver was in any way used in early households in a manner comparable to later, third-millennium usage. We indeed are hard pressed to cite evidence for the utilization of equivalence values in the Late Uruk period, with the possible exception of ration days.

An attempt is made in the following pages to give a general impression of the little we know about the accounting methods in the archaic period, with occasionally formalistic information culled from early texts, starting with a review of the development of writing; discussing in short fashion the importance of archaic numerical and metrological systems as elements of social control; illuminating the use of writing with some examples drawn from grain administration archives; touching on the matter of labour management; and closing with a tentative discussion of the implications the labour accounts have for our understanding of archaic ideology of class.

Account-keeping and the emergence of writing

More so than other writing systems, cuneiform has been described as a script based on a long history of preliterate accounting devices. Most who have studied the matter have considered early writing to be a collateral development from the exploitation of an increasingly complex method of fixing quantitative data.

Urbanization in southern Babylonia during the Middle and Late Uruk periods resulted in the growth of the settlement of southern Mesopotamian Uruk into an expanse of 200 hectares, with a population estimated to have approached 40,000 or more. Very large numbers of this population evidently were available for the construction and maintenance of the massive public district known as Eanna, with its monumental architecture surely the clearest testimony to the extraordinary new surplus economy supporting Uruk.

Hand in hand with these urban developments (Figure 2.1) are found in the archaeological record a series of accounting devices known popularly as 'tokens' since the publications of Denise Schmandt-Besserat (1992; 1996). While the archaeologist has been faulted for over-interpreting both the systematization and the iconic differentiation of these small clay objects (Englund 2004: 26 n. 4), there can be little doubt that at least a subset consisting of many of her simple geometrical artefacts represents the precursors of writing in Mesopotamia, and therefore that cuneiform began with numerical signs.

This assertion is based on two phenomena (Figure 2.2). First, the simple tokens were gathered in discrete assemblages and encased in clay balls in the periods immediately before the emergence of proto-cuneiform *c.* 3300 BC, and these balls were then sealed with impressions from cylinder seals—the hallmark of 3000 years of Babylonian

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	Period	Writing Phase	Historical Developments
3400		Clay bullae and numerical tablets	Beginning of large-scale settlement of Babylonia
3300	Late Uruk	Archaic texts from Uruk: writing Phase Uruk IV, writing Phase Uruk III	
3200			First urban centres
3100			Age of early civilization
3000	Jemdet Nasr		
2900	Early Dynastic I	Archaic texts from Ur	
2800			
2700	Early Dynastic II		Formation of large irrigation networks
2600		Texts from Fara	
2500	Early Dynastic III	Old Sumerian texts	Rival city-states
2400			

FIGURE 2.1 Overview of the chronology and historical developments of the earliest literate periods in Babylonia.

administrative history. Second, the plastic tokens were themselves impressed on the outer surfaces of some balls, leaving marks which, both physically and also in their context, conform exactly to the impressed numerical signs of the early so-called numerical tablets and the curvilinear tradition of Babylonian accounts down to the Ur III period at the end of the third millennium. We have little doubt that a statistical analysis of the overwhelming numbers of tokens still encased within clay envelopes would lead even further, to the establishment of the preliterate use of numerical sign systems with the same abstraction of unit bundling as has been shown for proto-cuneiform numerical notations. We should anticipate that we will find the two most important numerical systems in these tokens, one used to count discrete objects and one used to quantify capacity measures (Englund 2006).

It is of historical interest that the so-called Uruk expansion continued down through the use of bullae and sealed numerical tablets. Further, as Reinhard Dittmann (1986: 332–366) demonstrated, this contact continued into the earliest phase of 'ideographic' inscriptions of the Late Uruk period, those that I have called the numero-ideographic tablets (Englund 1998: 51–56). These texts from the Susa level 17Ax 'contact' (Damerow and Englund 1989: 15 n. 37; Englund 2004: 27 n. 6) correspond nicely with texts found in the area of the Red Temple at Uruk, characterized by their inclusion of seal impressions, numerical notations, and one or at most two apparent ideograms representing the basic agricultural commodities butter oil, textiles, and small cattle.

At this point there is an abrupt conclusion of interregional Uruk influence, with a continuation of development of writing in Uruk alone (Englund 2004: 28 n. 7). The

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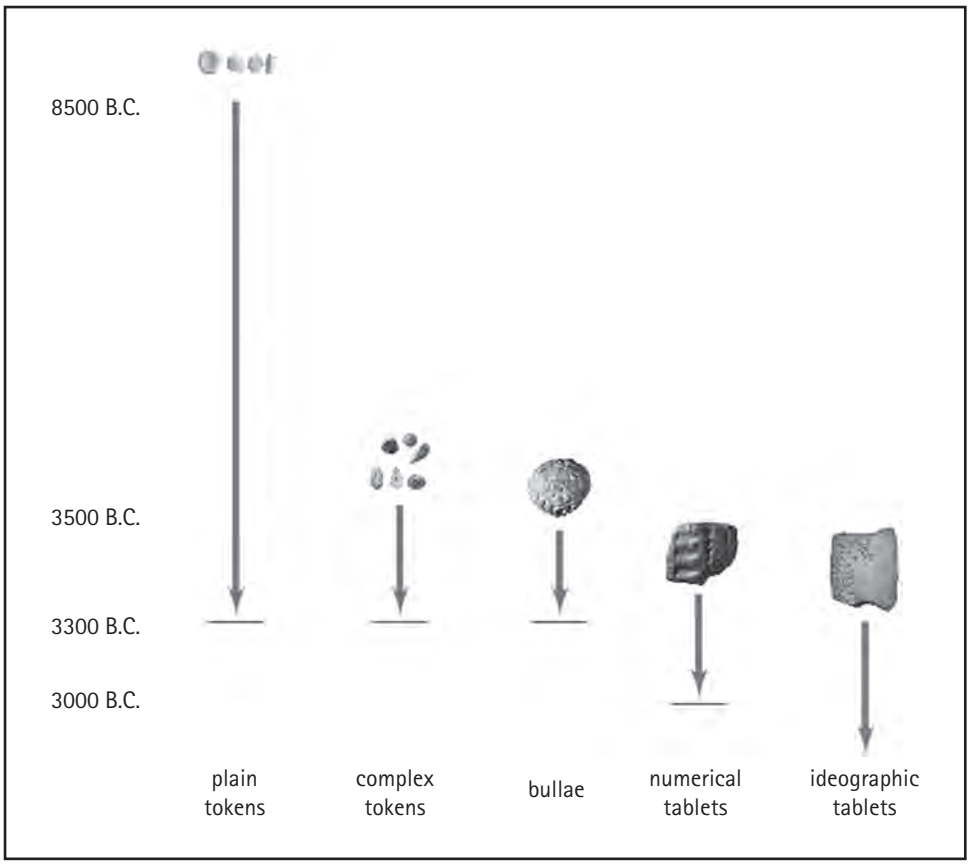

FIGURE 2.2 Denise Schmandt-Besserat's schema of the history of writing. (Based on Schmandt-Besserat 1992; 1996)

archives from Uruk consist above all of administrative documents, accompanied by a group of texts generally known as lexical lists, although there is good reason to assert that we have among these lists the earliest known example of literature (Englund and Nissen 1993: 25–29). It should be remembered that the numbers generally cited in this connection, 85% administrative and 15% lexical texts, represent averages; less than 1% of the earliest, the Uruk IV tablets, are of the lexical genre, while close to 20% of the following Uruk III tablets belong to this type of document. Whereas Uruk IV documents known to us derive without apparent exception from Uruk, those of the Uruk III (also called Jemdet Nasr) period come from a number of Babylonian sites, including Jemdet Nasr, Kiš, Uqair, Larsa, from transtigridian Tell Asmar, and, as post-Kuwait excavations streaming through London have shown, from Umma and from Adab. We should include here too the *c.* 1500 tablets and fragments of the so-called proto-Elamite phase in Susiana and regions to the east.

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The categories of administrative documents

We can divide proto-cuneiform administrative documentation into the two major bookkeeping types known from later periods in Babylonia, namely into primary and secondary documents (Figure 2.3). The easiest way to recognize the former type, consisting of receipts, bills, and simple transfers, etc., is by the physical size and the spatial format of the tablets. As a rule these are quite small, perhaps up to *c.* 8 × 8 cm, and might be divided into at most several cases. At present we can anticipate only that these sorts of simple documents contain no more than the most basic elements of a transaction or inventory record, as a rule including designations of quantified objects and of one or more actors involved in a relationship of some sort with those objects, often together with an indication of the administrative positions of these actors, as well as their geographical affiliations. In less frequent cases these simple texts would appear to include predicate information in the form of transaction qualifications: for instance, the signs BA or GI, which qualify, evidently for purposes of accounting clarity, the nature of the movement or storage of goods, including parcels of agricultural land.

The more interesting but rarer secondary documents can be twice or three times as large. They contain relatively large numbers of entries, and their surfaces are often divided into a complex format. As has been stated in numerous publications, this tablet format may be presumed to fulfil the syntactical functions of the more developed language representation found in later texts, particularly those of the Fara period and thereafter.

While we should be circumspect in our judgement of the syntactical force of the archaic ideographic record, there can be little doubt that the highly formalized system of numerical notations, with its roots in the token assemblages found in clay envelopes in Persia, Babylonia, and Syria, followed a wholly conventionalized internal syntax, and represented concrete facts in the archaic record that have played an imposing role in our partial decipherment of proto-cuneiform, and of proto-Elamite.

Numerical and metrological systems

Peter Damerow of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, and Jöran Friberg of the Chalmers Technical Institute in Göteborg, must be credited with having early on discovered the importance of the numerical signs in the archaic record and making progress in this decipherment. It should be obvious that accounts deal with numbers and measures; however, the treatment by Assyriologists of numerical notations in cuneiform texts has been one of the worst blemishes in a field otherwise marked by close attention to detail. Friberg was so vexed by the copies and interpretations of the

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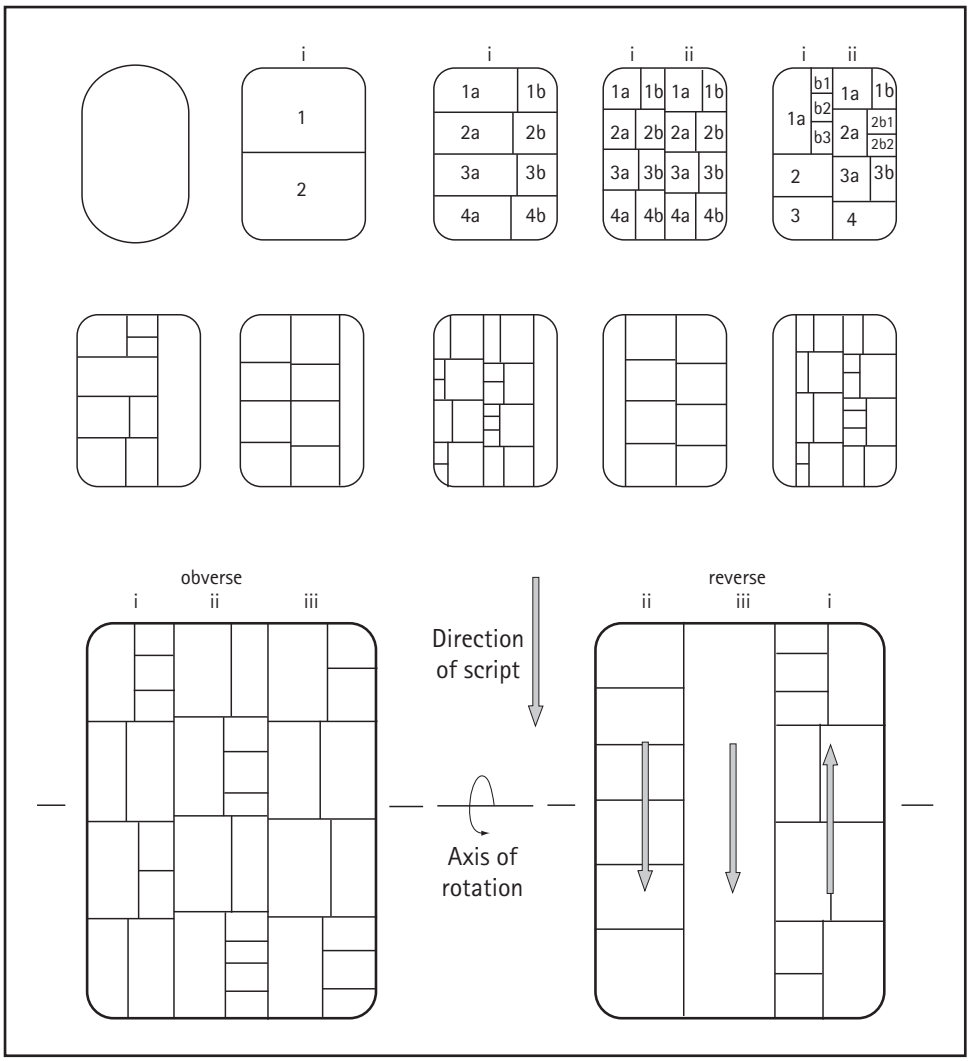

FIGURE 2.3 Formats of the proto-cuneiform texts: the two upper rows represent primary documents, the lower row a secondary document. (Drawing by Robert K. Englund)

important Jemdet Nasr texts by Stephen Langdon (1928) that, in the preparation of his groundbreaking re-edition of a number of these, together with archaic texts from other European collections (Friberg 1978–79), he made and exploited photocopies of the physical tablets in Oxford to aid in his work.

Langdon's *Pictographic Inscriptions from Jemdet Nasr* (1928) must be the worst example of cuneiform text editions on record. But a tradition of cavalierly dispensing with numerical notations in editions of administrative documents continues today in transliterated publications of primary sources with decimally interpreted sexagesimal

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notations, despite the standardization proposals of the associates of the *Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative* (http://cdl.museum.upenn.edu/doc/ATF/) that a system of transliteration reflecting in a strict fashion the physical realities of the cuneiform inscriptions be adhered to. This should be a basic convention in text-analytical treatments of Babylonian literature.

In considering proto-cuneiform accounts, the first signs that command one's attention must be the numerical signs. These were impressed deep in the clay surface with the butt ends of two round styli of different diameters. As a rule, impressions of the larger stylus represent larger numbers or measures, those of the smaller styli numbers and measures from the lower scale of the numerical systems they represented. In most cases these numerical notations come first, followed by some designation of the objects they qualify, then by representations of persons or offices. Although within discrete notations the signs were, with some few exceptions, entirely unambiguous and therefore might, again with some few exceptions, have been inscribed in free order (Englund 2004: 31 n. 13), numerical notations conformed to a rigid syntactical sequence, from signs representing the largest to those representing the smallest order of quantity or measure.

The rigidity of these notational sequences can be explained partly by the fact that many of the signs were ambiguous across system borders. Dependent on the object quantified by numerical notations, the sign N_{14} (a simple small circular impression) can represent ten clay pots of butter oil, a measure of grain corresponding to about 150 litres of barley, or a field of about 6 hectares. The real power of a clear understanding of the array of archaic numerical systems was first exploited by Friberg (1978–79), who published an analysis of the Uruk III period texts from Jemdet Nasr and other sites, in part made accessible to him by the Ashmolean Museum. Friberg's correction of an age-old misinterpretation of the structure of the archaic capacity system led to the partial decipherment of large numbers of accounts. Based in part on his work, Damerow and I were in the 1980s and 1990s able to abstract the systems shown in Figures 2.4a–b from a data set including the large numbers of texts from the German Uruk excavations (Damerow and Englund 1987).

The standardization of time in grain administration archives

These numerical representations afforded those working on the problem sufficient evidence to make a number of advances in the decipherment of proto-cuneiform, including the observation that already in the archaic period household administrators had imposed on the natural cycle of time an artificial year consisting of twelve months, each month of thirty days (Englund 1988). This realization and the subsequent discovery of the widespread use of time calculations in apparent rationing texts led to a fruitful exchange between Friberg and myself that identified a number of different grain

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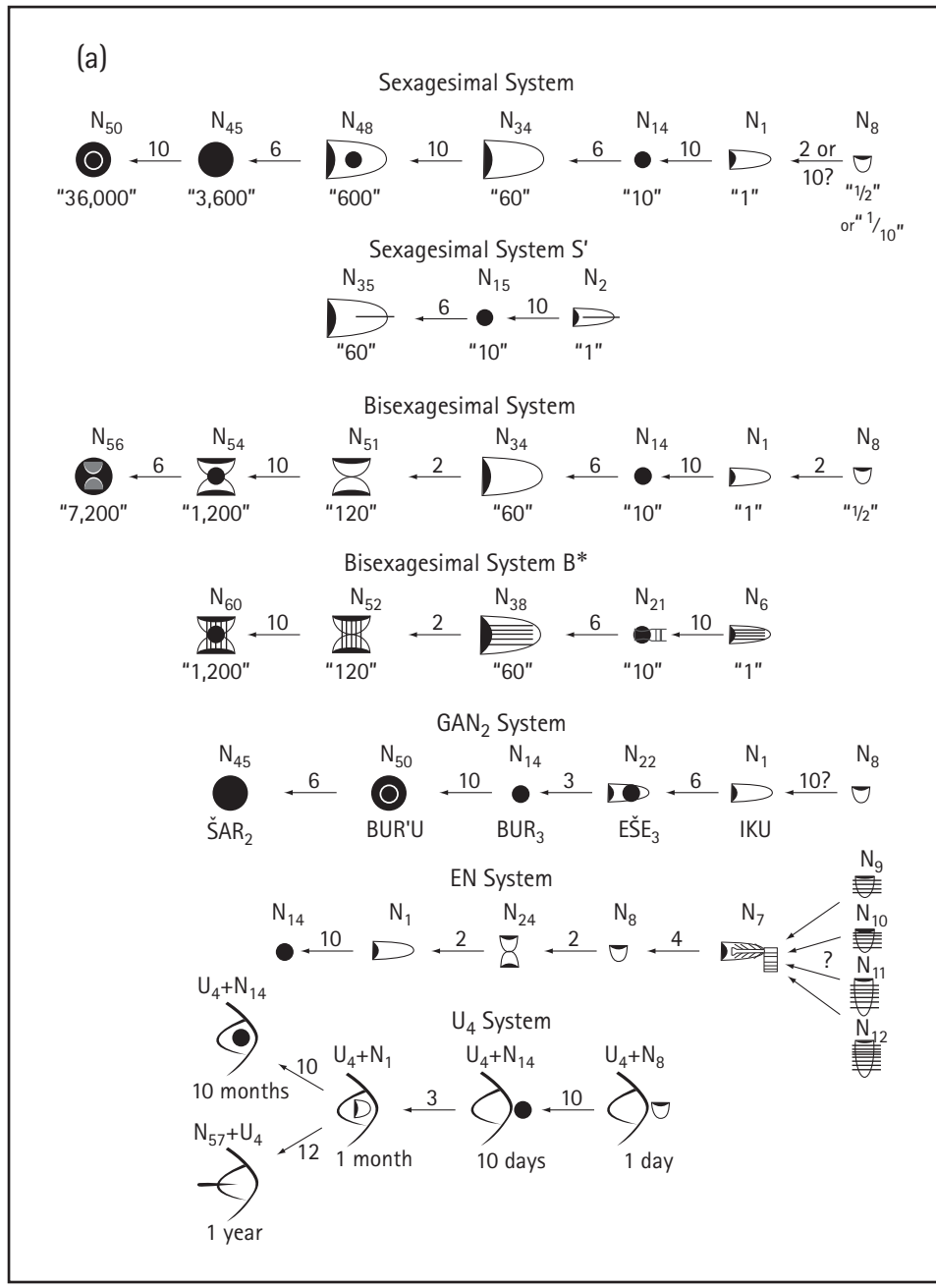

FIGURE 2.4 Proto-cuneiform numerical sign systems. Several systems of numerical signs served to qualify discrete objects (a), while others qualified measures of grains, (semi-)liquids, and time (a and b). (Drawing by Robert K. Englund)

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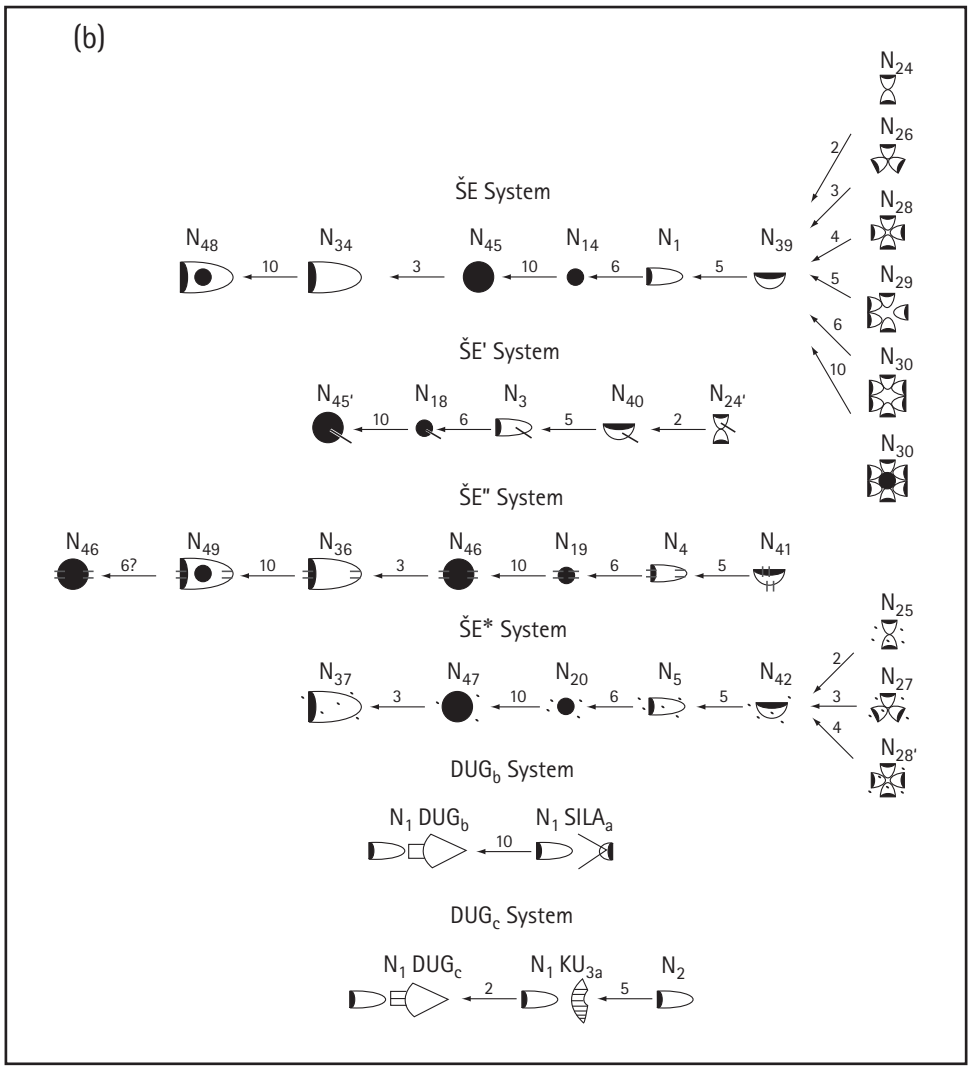

FIGURE 2.4. cont.

measure sizes employed in this rationing system, and to the plausible interpretation, first advanced by Friberg, that texts such as MSVO 1: 89 and 90, recording the daily disbursement of an amount of grain corresponding to the measure N_{24} (*c.* 2½ litres) or N_{39} (*c.* 5 litres) over a span of three years, might document a system of long-term temple offerings (Englund 1988: 138). It is hard to understand why an account should reckon through several years the daily disbursement of a small amount of grain if this were not meant as regular alimentation for a cult figure or for a person dedicated to serve the donor in the cult.

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The strengths and limitations of numerical analyses of archaic texts can be demonstrated using a group of documents from the Uruk III period recording the dispensation of agricultural products, above all dry and liquid grain products.

The key to understanding the important grain texts is in fact an artificial account, one of a number of school exercises known from the archaic period. Examples from later periods have received little attention. The text MSVO 4: 66 (Figure 2.5), possibly from Larsa, is something of a Rosetta stone in the decipherment of proto-cuneiform. In terms of both text format and sign meaning, this text resolved nearly all questions concerning a complex accounting mechanism. The individual entries of the text consist of notations that represent on the one hand discrete numbers of grain products—if dry products in the bisexagesimal, if liquid products in the sexagesimal system—and on the other hand notations that represent measures of grain equivalent to the amount necessary to produce the individually recorded products.

Once the information from MSVO 4: 66 could be marshalled, numbers of other complex accounts from the Uruk III period became clear to us, at least in their bookkeeping form. For instance, the Jemdet Nasr text MSVO 1: 93 (Figure 2.6 with reconstructions), shares much of its form and content with MSVO 4: 66 (Englund 2001). The obverse face of the tablet records in successive cases numbers of grain products together with notations that represent the amount of grain required for their production. As seems obvious based both on sign identifications and on production technology implicit in the types of cereals used, the first column lists dry goods—probably rough-ground flour and types of breads—while the first half of the second column lists liquid goods, certainly a type of beer represented by pictograms of ceramic vessels (Nissen, Damerow and Englund 1993: in particular 43–46). Following a double dividing-line, and therefore an accounting format device employed to indicate information derived from different primary sources, the scribe registers varying numbers of animals, animal products (butter oil, textiles, processed fish), and strings of dried fruit. Both sections are qualified, finally, with a set of ideograms representing the type of transaction recorded ('ration', GU_7), the originating place or office of the account (NI+RU, possibly representing the small settlement Jemdet Nasr itself), and the period of time covered in the account (Englund 2001: 18–21).

The ration system

The basic format of those entries recording dry goods is straightforward. In the first of two sub-cases of each entry, discrete objects were counted, using what we have, due to its continuation past the bundling phases of the more common sexagesimal system into units representing 120, 1200, and, probably, 7200 units (Figure 2.4), designated the bisexagesimal system (no adequate explanation of the origin of *either* system's numerical structure has been offered; cf. Englund 2004: 37 n. 21). The second sub-case records a notation corresponding to the amount of grain requisite for the production of the units recorded.

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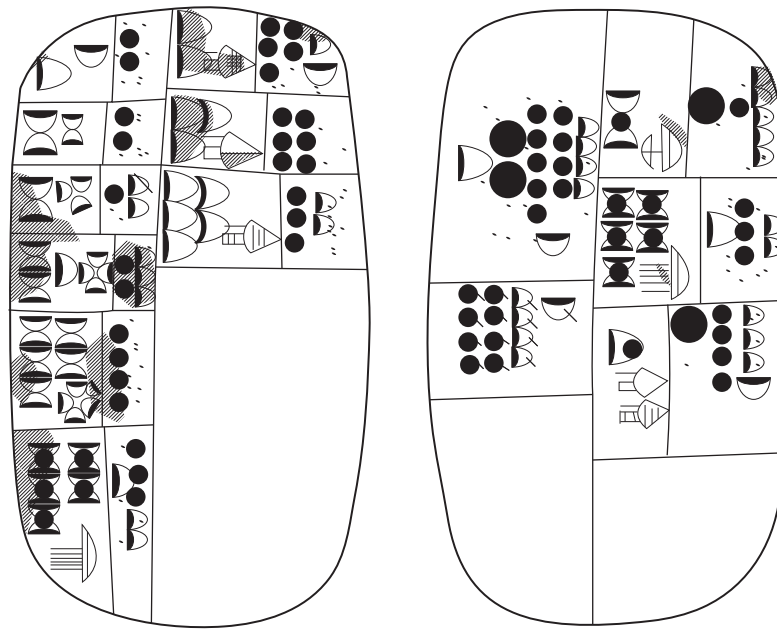
(a)



(b)

obv. i 1	$60 \times 1/5\ N_1$		$= 12 \times N_5$	$= 2 \times N_{20}$				
2	$120 \times 1/10\ N_1$		$= 12 \times N_5$	$= 2 \times N_{20}$				
3	$120 \times 1/15\ N_1$		$= 8 \times N_5$	$= 1 \times N_{20}$	$2 \times N_5$			
4	$300 \times 1/20\ N_1$		$= 15 \times N_5$	$= 2 \times N_{20}$	$3 \times N_5$			
5	$600 \times 1/25\ N_1$		$= 24 \times N_5$	$= 4 \times N_{20}$				
rev. i 1	1200			$1 \times N_{47}$	$1 \times N_{20}$	$5 \times N_5$		
obv. i 6 = rev. i 2	$6000 \times 1/30\ N_1$	$(GAR + 6N_{57})$	$= 200 \times N_5$	$= 1 \times N_{37}$	$3 \times N_{20}$	$2 \times N_5$		
obv. ii 1	$120 \times \sim 1/4\ N_1$	$(DUG_a + U_{2a})$	$\approx 30 \times N_5$	$= 5 \times N_{20}$	$1 \times N_5$	$1 \times N_{42}$		
2	$180 \times 1/5\ N_1$	$(DUG + AŠ_a)$	$= 36 \times N_5$	$= 6 \times N_{20}$				
3	$300 \times 1/15\ N_1$	$(KAŠ_a)$	$= 20 \times N_5$	$= 3 \times N_{20}$	$2 \times N_5$			
rev. i 3	600			$1 \times N_{47}$	$4 \times N_{20}$	$3 \times N_5$	$1 \times N_{42}$	
			$1 \times N_{47}$	$1 \times N_{20}$	$5 \times N_5$			
		$1 \times N_{37}$		$3 \times N_{20}$	$2 \times N_5$			
			$1 \times N_{47}$	$4 \times N_{20}$	$3 \times N_5$	$1 \times N_{42}$		
Grand total of flour used:		$1 \times N_{37}$	$2 \times N_{47}$	$9 \times N_{20}$	$4 \times N_5$	$1 \times N_{42}$		

Grand total of malt used:

$1N_{47}\ 4N_{20}\ 3N_5\ 1N_{42a}$ (rev. i 3) $\times 3/5 \approx 8 \times N_{18}\ 4 \times N_3\ 1 \times N_{40}$

FIGURE 2.5 (a) The administrative exercise tablet MSVO 4: 66. This text formed the basis for Friberg's identification of the structure of the archaic metrological system, used to count grain measures, in particular the relationship of 1:6 between the two signs N_{14} and N_1, earlier believed to be 1:10. (b) The calculations implicit in the text MSVO 4: 66 (see figure 2.4 for sign designations). (Drawing by Robert K. Englund)

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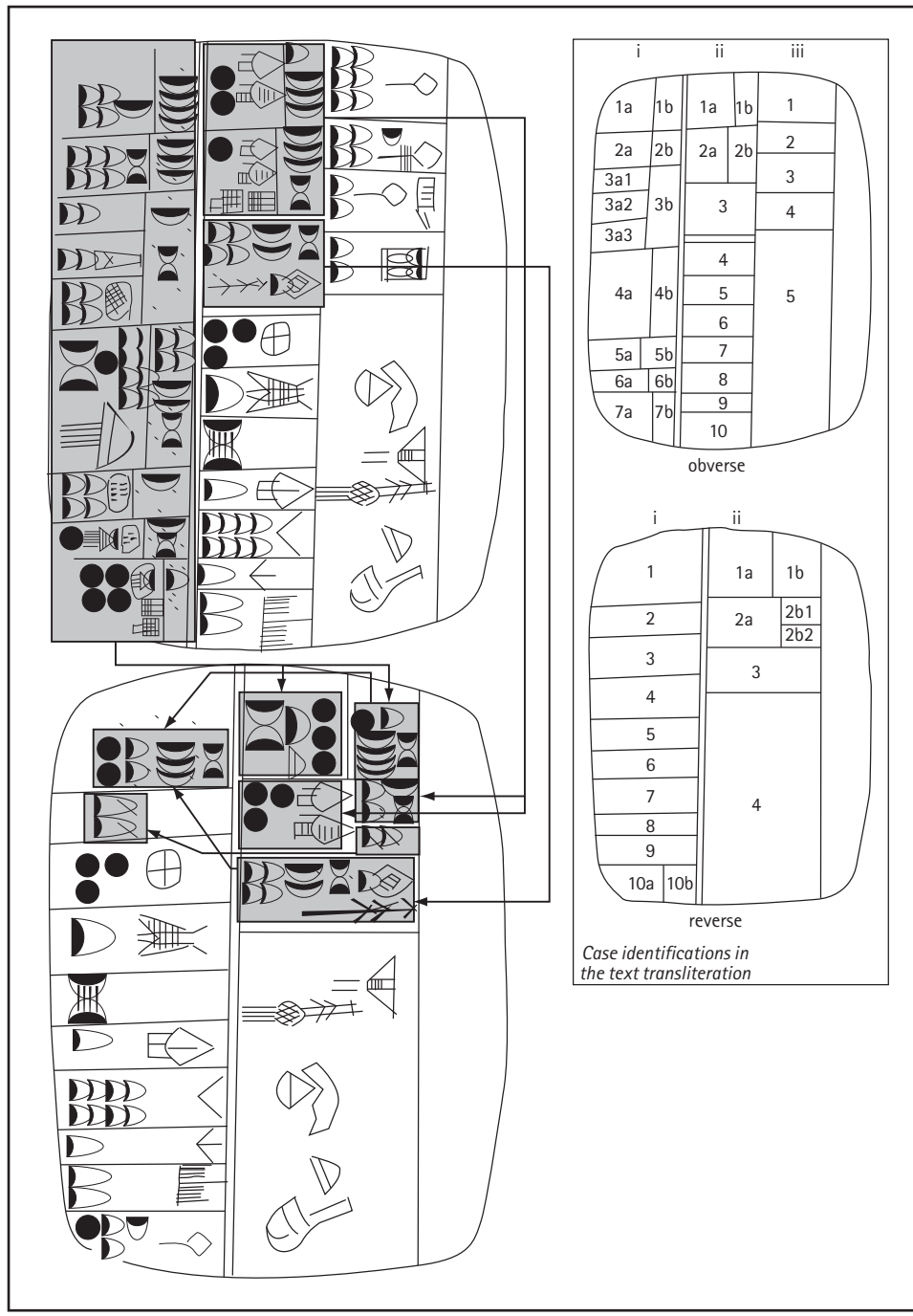

FIGURE 2.6 The account MSVO 1: 93 from Jemdet Nasr. It demonstrates many of the equivalencies, and the bookkeeping format of the exercise MSVO 4: 66, but includes ideographic notations representing agents, actions, and time spans connected with the account. (Drawing by Robert K. Englund)

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The system used in this case corresponds in its numerical structure to the common grain capacity sign system, but is qualified by the addition of an arbitrary number of impressed dots that seem to graphically represent the ground barley used in the grain products.

Grain equivalencies

As is usually the case with proto-cuneiform accounts, eventual subtotals and totals are inscribed on the reverse face. Here too, the categories of goods are treated differently, with a full tally of products in a first sub-case of the right column. The second sub-case was used here to tally all grain products with grain equivalencies. These equivalencies evidently represent the final value of these goods and are thus alone included in the grand total of the left column (Figure 2.7).

This formation and use of grain product equivalencies as exemplified by the texts MSVO 1: 93, and MSVO 4: 66, must be considered an important step in the direction of general value equivalencies best attested in the Ur III period for silver, but then still generally applicable for other commodities such as grain or fish, including finally also labour time. It is not possible to determine whether, as would seem intuitively likely, these equivalencies simply describe the amount of grain expended in producing different types of bread, beer, and other cereal products. But even if this is the case and the accounts presume no value equivalencies for products that might, for instance, require in their processing more labour or different ingredients than would be represented by a one-to-one relationship between the capacity of the finished product and the amount of barley corresponding to the product's grain capacity, still the *seeds* of value equivalencies among disparate goods may have been sown in these accounting procedures. The concept of value equivalency was a secure element in Babylonian accounting by at least the time of the sales contracts of the Early Dynastic IIIa (Fara) period, *c.* 2600 BC (cf. Englund 2004: 38 n. 22).

While there are no evident notations in the archaic texts which exhibit the level of labour time and production norm complexity of the Ur III period, still at least two components of archaic accounts are instructive about the accounting procedures at the dawn of literacy. In the first place there appears to have been a close connection between the graphic system employed to record calendrical units and that used to quantify measures of grain. In both cases the unit 'month' played a central role. Only those calendrical notations representing one or more months employed the standard forms of the sexagesimal system, with the sexagesimal unit representing the discrete unit 'one.' Notations for days and years alike employed derivative numerical signs (N_8 and N_{57}, respectively). At the same time the capacity system centres on this same unit sign N_1, yet with diverging relationships between this and other signs in the system.

In particular the signs representing lower values in the system are arranged in a sequence that successively divides the basic unit into 'fifth' (N_{42}), and further on down to the sign N_{30a}, which represents a measure of grain 1/30th the size of the basic unit.

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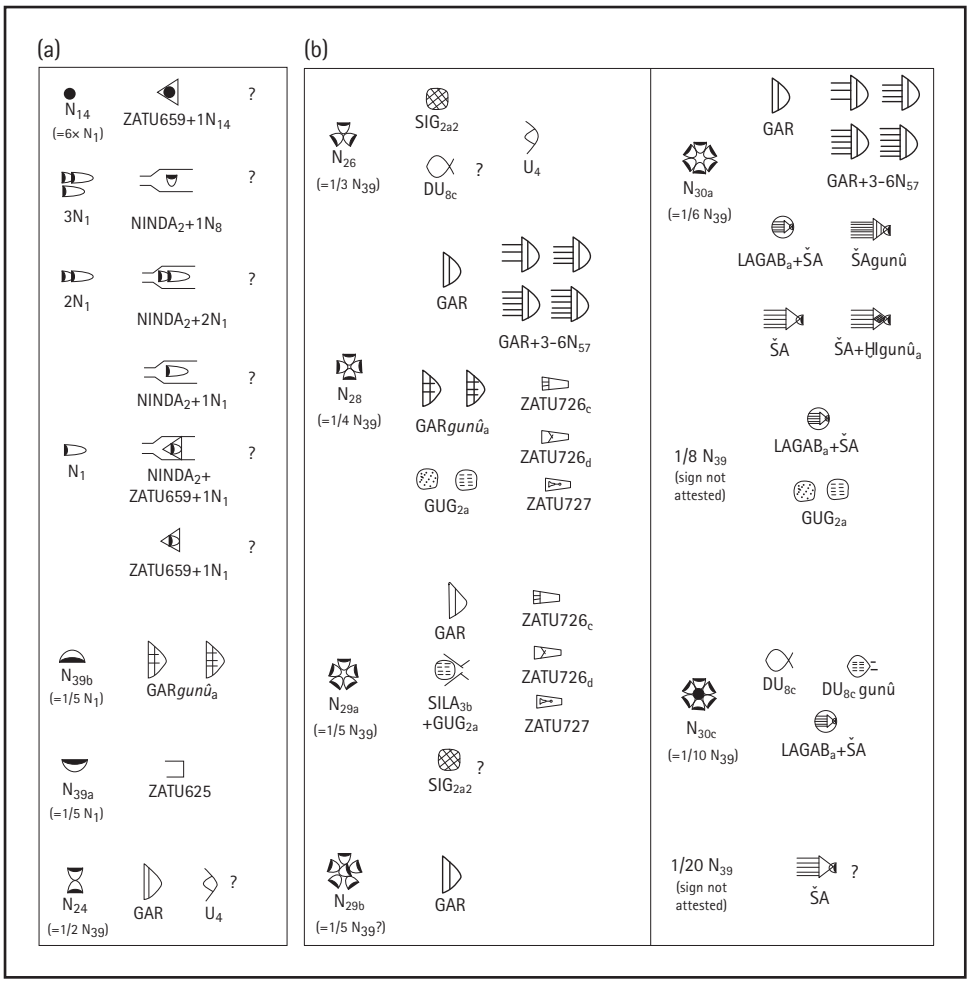

FIGURE 2.7 Equivalencies in grain accounts. The table lists, in order from largest to smallest attested values, the grain equivalencies of products found in the proto-cuneiform record, together with their respective ideographic correspondences (ideographic correspondence of the same numerical signs is not included). (Drawing by Robert K. Englund)

It cannot be a coincidence that this sign so regularly corresponds in the archaic accounts to the ideogram GAR. This latter sign is the pictographic representation of the bevelled-rim bowl, a clay bowl with a capacity equal to a standardized daily ration in Mesopotamia. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the numerical sign N_1 represents one month-ration for one labourer in the archaic period.

In the second place we find in the archaic accounts good evidence for the quantification of household-dependent labour entirely compatible with later tradition. The Jemdet Nasr accounts MSVO 1: 212–214 belong together in a relationship of secondary and

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primary documents and represent an accounting transfer without any gaps (cf. Englund 2004: 40 n. 23).

It should be noted that the ideographic qualifications of those persons recorded by name in the individual entries of MSVO 1, 212–214—namely, with the sign combinations SAL+KUR and SAG+MA, and with $ERIN_2$—are designations of dependent labourers, probably slaves taken as plunder in violent actions against Babylonian neighbours. The twenty-seven individuals so qualified do not constitute a large number of slaves, but other accounts are suggestive of larger groups, for instance W 9827 with a minimum of 211 such individuals (Englund 1994: pl. 118; 2010: 78–79).

Accounting for labour

The method of bookkeeping employed by archaic scribes to record groups of labourers is not particularly complex. We have approximately fifty recognizable accounts of this sort with numbers qualified by sign combinations that represent 'labourer' and including sign combinations evidently representing personal names. These persons are also qualified according to gender and age. For instance, the text W 23999,1 (Cavigneaux 1991: 74) in Figure 2.8 distinguishes subgroups of five female and three male humans, these subgroups in each case further divided according to age, whereby presumable infants are qualified with sign combinations that might be translated as 'womb-suckling'. It is noteworthy that precisely the same accounting format is employed in the records of animals. Here, too, pigs are separated according to age and, in the case of small and large cattle, animals are divided according to sex. The gender qualifications for the young of these animals are represented by SAL and KUR, the same signs that generally describe men and women. Furthermore, as A. Vaiman (1991: 121–133) has shown, Uruk accounts record young animals and young 'slaves' with the same derived numerical sign N_8 (Figure 2.9), which generally qualifies a half (in some limited applications one-tenth) of some unit counted in the sexagesimal and bisexagesimal systems. This may derive from an apportioning of rations to children of productive age of approximately half that of adults, as was administrative labour practice in later periods.

Labour and slavery

We cannot be certain that the taxonomic differentiation in archaic Babylonia between higher-status humans on the one hand, and lower-status humans and animals on the other, is a meaningful one. Still, it might be of interest to compare Babylonian with archaic Persian data. The sadly neglected field of proto-Elamite studies has demonstrated the use of the same numero-metrological systems as those known in archaic Babylonia, with the addition of a purely decimal system. As far as we can tell, the sexagesimal system qualifies discrete goods in the same field of application as that of Babylonia, except that some objects were qualified specifically with the decimal system. This

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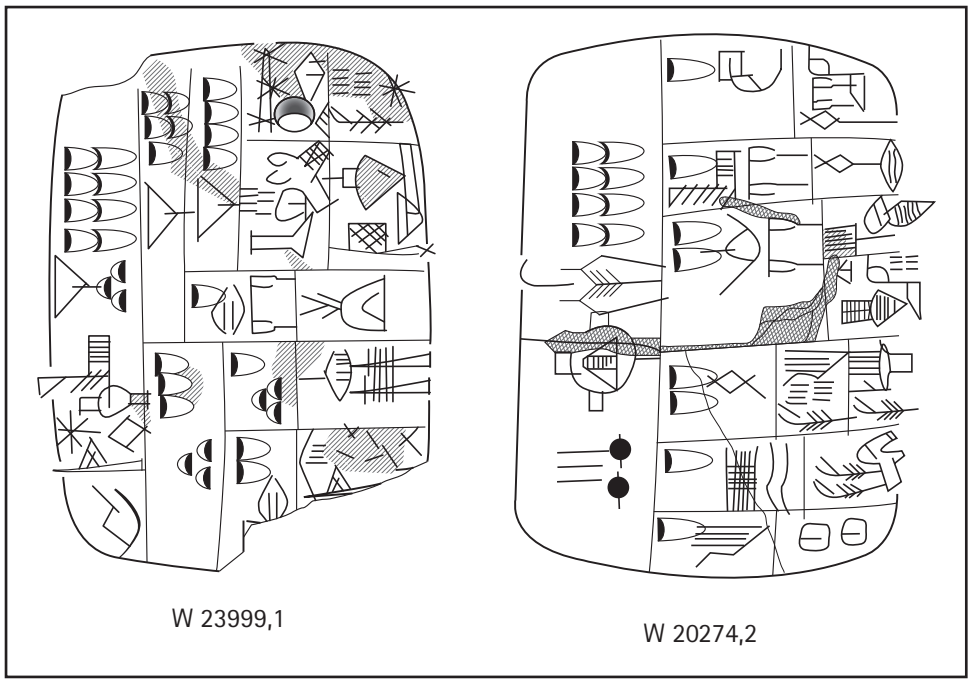

FIGURE 2.8 Accounts of domestic 'herds' of slaves (W 23999,1 and W 20774,2). Formal accounting practices suggest that these two accounts from Uruk in the Uruk III period record the make-up of two eight-member 'herds' of human labourers. (Drawing by Robert K. Englund)

decimal system, employing signs borrowed from the bisexagesimal system, qualifies what apparently are domestic animals, but also what we believe are lower-status humans. It appears that high-status humans—foremen and high officials—were, as all humans in Babylonia, qualified sexagesimally. If, as we suspect, these unusual numerical systems were introduced into Persia during the period of the Uruk expansion, then we can speculate that the inclusion of high-status humans in the Babylonian sexagesimal system represents a vestige of a two-tiered taxonomy of living beings practised in Babylonia, including domestic labourers with domestic animals. The concept of *homo sapiens sapiens*, seen relatively in different populations even today, must have been a much more fluid concept in prehistoric times.

Can we call the proposed taxonomy of the Late Uruk 'slave' = 'animal' an ideological perspective? It may be that we are looking at the enslavement and exploitation of foreign populations, reflecting a deep element of the earliest native Babylonian population. But it may also reflect a developing class-consciousness. Guillermo Algaze (2001: 211–213, 215–228, 415–418), arguing that this primitive categorization represents 'a new paradigm of the nature of social relationships in human societies', has stated that the identification of humans with domestic animals is even a *necessary stage* in the formation of early states. Certainly, when we speak of 'work force', 'farm hands', or 'factory hands',

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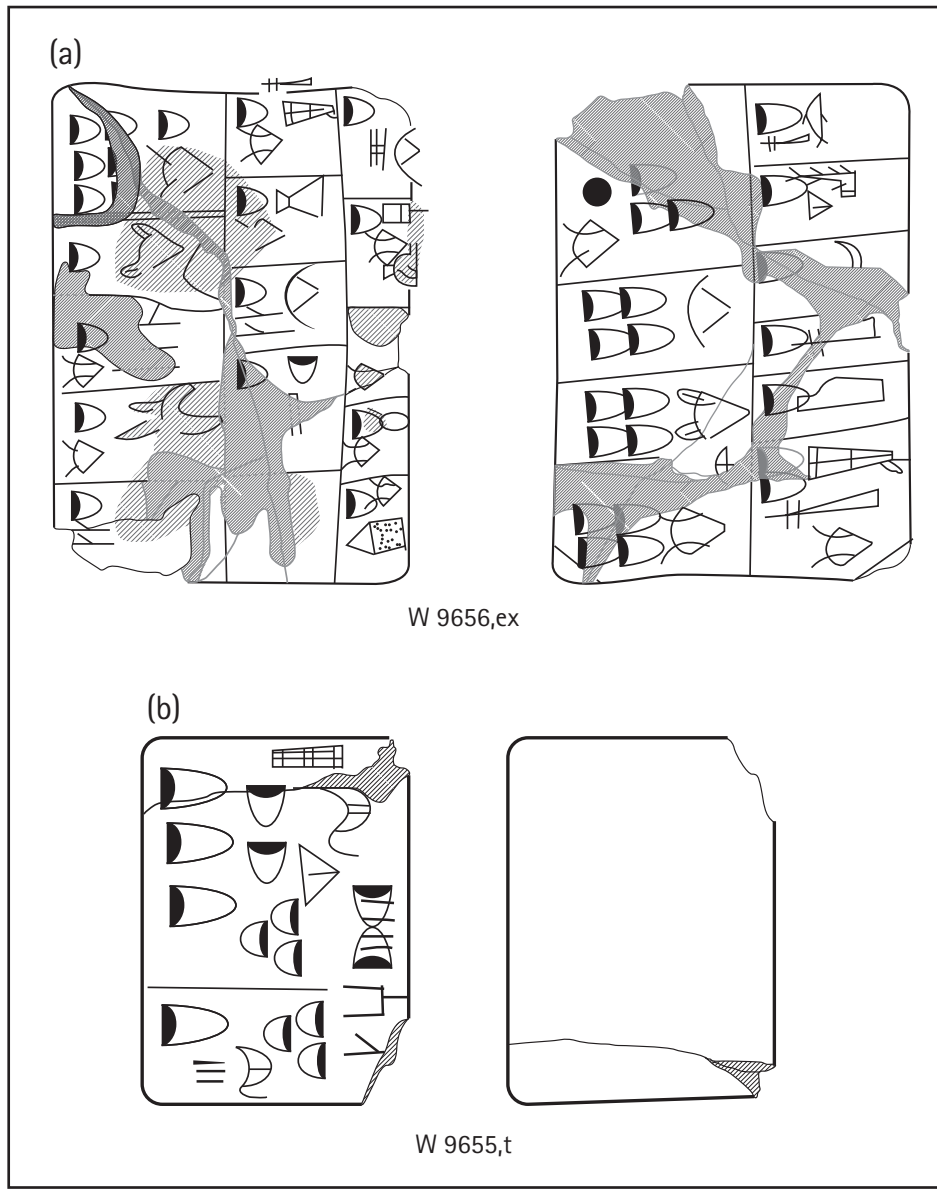

FIGURE 2.9 Numerical qualification of young animals and humans. Texts of the Uruk IV period record numbers of cattle (a) and humans (b), in both cases including the numerical sign N_8 designating young animals. (Drawing by Robert K. Englund)

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we abstract labourers little less than Babylonian scribes, who recorded pigs and labourers in similar fashion, both serving the community of man. Our archaic accountants may have forgotten how close they were to membership in the same fraternity.[1]

Further reading

Nissen, Damerow, and Englund (1993) is a well-illustrated introduction to the early development of cuneiform, with a special focus on Late Uruk documents (*c.* 3500–3000 BC) while Englund (1998) offers a concise survey of these texts and their historical context. For the roughly contemporary, so-called Proto-Elamite texts from Iran, see Damerow and Englund (1989).

Specific aspects of accounting conventions and practices, and their social context, are analysed by Englund (1988, labour management; 2001, grain accounting; and 2010, slavery). For a study of proto-cuneiform texts that stresses the revolutionary impact of the 'invention of writing' see Glassner (2003; but cf. Englund 2005). Nissen (1993) is an attempt to reconstruct Mesopotamian society on the basis of archaeological and textual remains from the mid-fourth to the mid-third millennium BC, while Visicato (2000) traces the role of professional scribes during the same period.

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[1] This chapter is a lightly edited and updated version of Englund (2004). We are grateful to the series editor, Michael Hudson, and the publisher, Mark Cohen, for permission to reproduce it here.

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CHAPTER 3

NUMERACY AND METROLOGY

GRÉGORY CHAMBON

SINCE the first decipherments of cuneiform in the 19th century AD, scholars have been interested in the reconstruction of ancient Near Eastern numerical and metrological systems. The aim above all has been to approach ancient political and economical reality by quantifying and estimating, among other things, the dimensions of urban centres, the amounts of rations delivered to palaces, or war booty. It is usually assumed today that numerical and metrological data directly reflect the concrete world, which scribes tried to describe, quantify, and organize. And indeed, the reconstruction of the arithmetical relationships between the units of measure—capacity, length, area, weight—led to an important synthesis, which still represents a key reference work in ancient Near Eastern research (Powell 1987–90).

On the other hand, historians of mathematics, since the great decipherments of the 1930s and '40s (Neugebauer 1935–7; Thureau-Dangin 1938; Neugebauer and Sachs 1945) have focused their attention on the evidence for metrology and mathematics in scribal schooling. But for many decades they focused almost exclusively on the internal analysis of mathematics, barely exploring the social and intellectual activities which enabled its development, transformation, and diffusion (for this problem, see Robson 2007a).

These two different ways of approaching the numerical and metrological systems, together with a widespread assumption that information that looks 'mathematical' is not overly productive for historians, led to the academic fields of ancient Near Eastern studies and the history of mathematics pursuing very different topics and methods from each other for much of the 20th century (Høyrup 1996).

A new interdisciplinary picture has developed over the last few decades, from the perspective of the social and cultural history of Mesopotamia. Concerning numeracy, the social and intellectual activities of professional scribes are now investigated in order to give equal weight to numeracy and literacy (Robson 2008). Concerning metrology, important philological analyses of the use of different weight standards in pre-monetary societies (e.g. Parise 1989; Zaccagnini 1986) have led to new trends in careful

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archaeological studies of weights in their cultural and social contexts (Alberti, Ascalone, and Peyronel 2006; Otto 2006). This opens up a broader, and necessary, perspective for interdisciplinary work between archaeologists and philologists. At the same time, studies focused on the visual properties of mathematical and metrological tablets and on the way in which the texts are laid out, have been initiated (Robson 2001; Proust 2009).

Nevertheless, within the study of numeracy and metrology relatively little attention has been paid to the development and characteristics of number and unit signs—both graphic and conceptual—nor to their roles within ancient writing systems. On the one hand, day after day excavations uncover metrological artefacts, like weights or vessels of standard volume, which are based on metrological units and were created according to specific standardization processes in order to serve practical functions in everyday life. On the other hand, the signs for numbers and measures in the cuneiform record are products of other particular standardization processes, dependent on local scribal traditions, regional writing conventions, the general evolution of the repertory of cuneiform signs, and, last but not least, innovations in calculation techniques.

This chapter explores some interactions between numeracy, metrology, material culture, and scribal activity within the social and cultural context of Mesopotamia. In order to point out the local complexity of the relationship between practical uses of metrology and written metrological systems, we pay particular attention to one case study: metrology in the city of Ebla in the third millennium BC.

Material culture, scribal background, and cognitive representations

Because cultural and political changes each influence the use of units of measure, the study of Mesopotamian metrology poses both diachronic and synchronic problems of interpretation.

The first problem involves the use of the same units over a long span of time in one region. This case can be illustrated with the 'assload' (Akkadian *imērum*), a measure of capacity written with the logogram ANŠE, which originally had the basic meaning 'donkey'. The assload is mentioned for the first time in the roughly contemporary cuneiform records of the Old Assyrian period (*c.* 1945–1835 BC) and the Old Babylonian period (*c.* 1850–1600 BC). The geographical range of this measure is limited to Northern Mesopotamia, namely the region demarcated by the upper stretches of the valleys of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. The assload was used by traders from the city of Assur (modern Qala'at Sherqat) who transported tin and woollen fabrics to Central Anatolia in return for silver and gold. The origin of this measure is still unclear, but it was in use for an extraordinarily long time, until the end of the Neo-Assyrian period in the late 7th century BC. Nevertheless, the actual capacity value of the assload seems to have varied enormously across time, from *c.* 80 litres to 184 litres, according to traditional

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assumptions based on philological and archaeological data (Powell 1984). How can we explain the stable existence of this capacity measure over more than a thousand years on the one hand, and the enormous variation of it absolute value during that span of time, on the other?

Studies of metrology have to confront another problem which concerns the use of different but contemporaneous designations for the multiples of a basic unit. In the Old Babylonian period, for example, no fewer than four different capacity systems were based on the unit *qû*, written with the logogram SILÀ and usually estimated to be roughly 1 litre in size. The GUR of 300 *qû* was a common capacity measure in south Mesopotamia and the lower Euphrates. In the town of Mari, on the middle Euphrates, administrators preferred to use a GUR of 120 *qû*. The standard measure in the northwest, called *parīsu*, represents 60 *qû* while in the upper regions, as we saw, the 'assload' (*imērum*) of 100 *qû* was traditionally in use. Why did various local administrations share a common measure—the *qû*—but, at the same time, use different higher capacity measures?

Approaching these problems requires us to take into account the distinction between material culture, cognitive constructions, and scribal background, which depend on a variety of economic conditions, social dynamics, and practical goals.

Standards of measure, such as weights, measuring ropes, and vessels, are produced in order to facilitate the transactions of daily life purposes; their size and range are configured to suit the needs of practical activities such storage, transport, and land surveying. It is therefore not surprising that the cuneiform record offers us many specific local expressions for standards of measure: for instance, the 'king's rope' (*ašal šarrim*), the set of 'weights of the house of administration' (NA$_4$.HI.A *bīt têrtim*), the '*sūtu*-capacity measure of the god Šamaš' (*sūt* ^{d}UTU). At another level, the units of measure were conceptualized and organized into different systems which were the product both of social and cultural conventions and of representations of the concepts of measure and number (Cancik-Kirschbaum and Chambon 2006). The embodiment of these mentally constructed objects on a particular medium—on clay—required the development of specific signs and syntactic rules, which enabled scribes to represent the individual units and the ratios between them (Damerow 1999; see Figure 3.1).

Consequently, the signs for units of measure do not have a straightforward relationship with real measuring objects; they result from processes depending on scribal choices within a social and cultural context. One quantity can be expressed in different ways, for instance 'half a kilo', 'a pound' or '500 g'. Conversely, different quantities can be designated in the same way, like the various units of length called 'pound' ('livre') used in pre-modern France (Charbonnier 2007). From this point of view, the questions asked earlier about the 'assload' and the multiples of the *qû* can be reformulated as follows:

(1) Why did the Assyrians keep the sign ANŠE for a capacity measure for over a thousand years, while over time they changed the absolute values of capacity vessels and containers?
(2) Did the different Old Babylonian capacity systems really fit each other, in terms of absolute values, even if various local administrations used the same sign, SILÀ,

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FIGURE 3.1 Two Neo-Assyrian officials weigh what may be round metal bars on a balance scale: detail from the Rassam Obelisk, reign of Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BC), from Kalhu, modern Nimrud, Iraq (British Museum, ME 118800+136897+136898). (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website: www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/t/the_rassam_obelisk.aspx)

for their basic capacity measure? Did one SILÀ measure in Mari equal one SILÀ measure in south Mesopotamia, for instance?

These questions need further investigation and cannot be answered completely for the moment but, as we see, each in fact concerns both *material* and *scribal* cultures, within their social and cultural context.

The issue of the metrological 'norm'

A consequence of this paradigm is the need to distinguish between the 'metrological norm' and the 'scribal norm', that is to say between the establishment of units with standard values, which are reflected in concrete metrological objects for practical purposes, and the establishment of spoken words and repertoires of written signs, which enable these units to be expressed orally or on clay.

The material evidence offers us a large numbers of vessels and weights, which could have served as capacity and weight standards. Nevertheless, the determination of metrological standards raises a number of methodological problems (Payne 2005). The first is that it is difficult to know what standards of accuracy were set in ancient times for

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the manufacture of measuring containers and weights; it would certainly not have been possible in antiquity to make vessels and weights with any degree of precision or consistency. The second problem is that of inadequate treatment of the archaeological evidence. For example, the usual attribution of the value of 1.84 litres for the Neo-Assyrian 'heavy' *qû* is in fact quite uncertain, since it was deduced from metrological experiments on jars from the Assyrian city of Nimrud, whose volume actually varies considerably between *c.* 1.83 and 2.23 litres (Powell 1984). But the most relevant problem involves the exact role played by vessels and weights in antiquity: we do not know, for example, if a particular jar was considered as a measuring standard and, if it was, what importance was given to it. Instead of categorizing ancient metrological artefacts according to our modern concept of 'standard', we should pay attention to the notion of the 'norm' in the societies of Mesopotamia themselves.

The concept of 'norm' in Mesopotamia is above all linked with the concepts of righteousness and truth, which find a concrete counterpart in metrology: in Sumerian literature for example, the goddesses Nisaba and Ninlil are given the means (the 1-rod reed and lapis lazuli measuring rope) to measure land justly and accurately for an equitable distribution of the harvest (Robson 2008: 118). Šamaš, the sun-god and god of justice, is occasionally associated with weighing (Rainey 1965). This ideal of metrological justice is reflected in royal rhetoric (Robson 2008: 119), particularly in the law collections promulgated by various kings of the Ur III period and of the Old Babylonian period (see Figure 16.1). For example, the prologue to a law collection of Ur-Namma, king of Ur (r. 2112–2095 BC), or perhaps of his son Šulgi (r. 2094–2047 BC), explicitly mentions the king's involvement with the standardization of fair metrology:

> I made the copper bariga and standardised it at 1 sila. I made the copper ban and standardised it at 10 sila. I made the normal royal copper ban and standardised it at 5 sila. I standardised the stone weights from 1 shekel of silver to 1 mina. I made the bronze sila and standardised it at 1 mina. (Roth 1995: 16; Robson 2008: 119)

The idea behind this is not to impose new metrological standards on all the local administrations in the territories under the king's control, but to establish reliable measures for use in daily life—for example, in case of disputes between merchants using different sets of weights or capacity measures. In fact, several different capacity measures continued to coexist under the Ur III state (Gomi 1993). Some literary texts, such as a hymn to the goddess Nanše (Heimpel 1981) as well as lawcodes such as king Hammurabi's (Roth 1995: 98), reveal that a principal concern was to detect and deter the fraudulent use of weights and measures that were too large or too small. These reference measuring standards would certainly have been kept in protected and sacred areas and the documentation shows us that their use was supervised by special authorities, called *ebbum* in the second millennium BC, who guaranteed the fairness of the transaction (Michel 1990). In many respects, a comparison with studies on similar metrological practices in medieval Europe (e.g. Witthöft 1986), could lead to new and interesting approaches.

To sum up, processes of standardizing measuring vessels and weights are attested from the third millennium BC onwards, but they were not meant to replace all the

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FIGURE 3.2 Metrological table written by the scribe Warad-Sin. (Drawing by E. Robson, reproduced from Robson 2008: 103, with permission from Princeton University Press)

metrological systems hitherto in use, as was the purpose of the introduction of the metric system in 19th-century France; instead, they served to facilitate commercial transactions and administrative activities.

At the level of writing, the so-called metrological lists, which enumerate measures of capacity, weight, surface, and length in increasing order, are often considered to bear traces of the normalization process (Proust 2009). These lists, most of them dating from the Old Babylonian period, were memorized by young scribes in their elementary education and then reconstructed in written form (Robson 2008: 97; Figure 3.2). The pedagogical aims of these lists were twofold: they provided information both about the units in each metrological system and about the notations for these units. Their vertical enumeration enabled trainee scribes to express—and then to memorize—the ratios between the units. We can see this, for instance, in a sequence from the weights system. The numerical signs 𒌋 u (diagonal wedge) and 𒁹 diš (vertical wedge) were used to express 10 and 1 respectively. The signs for the weight measures were, in order of size, gín for 'shekel' (*c.* 8 g) and ma-na for 'mina' (*c.* 500 g):

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Transliteration		Translation
1(u) 1(diš)	gín	11 shekels
1(u) 2(diš)	gín	12 shekels
1(u) 3(diš)	gín	13 shekels
1(u) 4(diš)	gín	14 shekels
1(u) 5(diš)	gín	15 shekels
1(u) 6(diš)	gín	16 shekels
1(u) 7(diš)	gín	17 shekels
1(u) 8(diš)	gín	18 shekels
1(u) 9(diš)	gín	19 shekels
1/3	ma-na	1/3 mina
1/2	ma-na	1/2 mina
2/3	ma-na	2/3 mina
5/6	ma-na	5/6 mina
1	ma-na	1 mina

The units are listed in increasing order: the mina is larger than the shekel. The ratio between the two units is expressed with fractional values: the notation '1/3 mina' directly follows the increasing progression '11 shekels, 12 shekels, 13 shekels, . . . , 19 shekels', indicating that 1/3 mina equals 20 shekels, and thus that 1 mina equals 60 shekels.

As the same kind of metrological lists have been found in many different ancient cities, it could be argued that schoolhouses were the main vector of metrological standardization over a large area. In order to verify this assumption, we would have to check not only the school texts but administrative and business documents too, which reflect other aspects of daily life. In the case of southern Mesopotamia, the two kinds of documentation in the cities of Nippur and Ur match very well: the metrological systems and notations for units of measure that were learned in the course of a scribal education were used in the documentation of the local administration too. On the other hand, the standard metrological lists found in other cities, such as Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast, do not exactly reflect the metrology used in the administrative texts recovered from those places. It is not only the ratios between the units that differ but also the ways of writing them. Shekels were typically accounted for decimally in texts treating local matters (Chambon 2005), while the table of weights and measures, discovered in multiple copies in the House of Rap'anu (perhaps a school), reflects the standard Mesopotamian weight system, with 60 shekels = 1 mina and 60 minas = 1 talent (Bordreuil 2006).

To conclude, whereas teaching traditions were highly uniform across Mesopotamia in the Old Babylonian period, there were a variety of local traditions in administrative praxis. The normative function of the metrological lists has to be associated, therefore, solely with the educational milieu; to what extent it influenced administrative activities has yet to be investigated.

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Number signs for calculating and number signs for enumerating

Aside from metrological lists, many Old Babylonian metrological tables have been found. The same units are entered on the tables, in the same order, as in the lists—but they are written next to a number in the so-called sexagesimal place value system. This notation system, which is discussed in a number of publications (e.g. Powell 1976; Robson 2008: 75) is based on three main features. First, it contains 59 digits formed by only two signs 𒁹 and 𒌋, repeated as many times as necessary; this type of notation is highly standardized. Second, the order of magnitude of the numbers noted in this system is not indicated: 1, 60, 60^2, 60^3, 1/60, $1/60^2$, etc. are written in the same way, with the vertical wedge 𒁹. The third feature concerns the exact function of this system, which probably developed over the last few centuries of the third millennium BC: it does not serve as a system for recording real-world numbers but as a calculating device.

Metrological tables are thus actually calculation tools, which offer a correspondence between one unit of measure and one notation in the sexagesimal place value system. The quantities expressed in traditional metrologies (on the left of the tablet) are temporarily transformed into numerical notations (on the right) that can be manipulated without regard to absolute value or metrological system. Scribal school tablets show explicitly that notations in the sexagesimal place value system were exclusively used for performing multiplications, finding inverses, and calculating nth powers of numbers. Once the calculation was performed, the result was expressed in the appropriate metrological units and recorded as a concrete quantity again. This passage from one notation system into another offered the possibility of transforming quantities expressed in one metrological system into quantities noted in another—for example, length measures into areas—even when the two systems did not mesh together very well.

Alongside, and predating, the sexagesimal place value system, a discrete counting system was in use which is attested already in the very earliest written documentation from late fourth-millennium Uruk (Nissen, Damerow, and Englund 1993). It consists of grouping individually counted objects such as people, animals, or jars into tens, sixties, 600s and 3600s. Over the course of the third millennium BC, this system was gradually 'cuneiformized'; that is to say scribes began to write the numerical signs with a cuneiform stylus, rather than impressing a round stylus into the clay (Figure 3.3).

The discrete counting system is an absolute value system: the numbers are written additively, by repeating the signs as many times as needed. For example, the number 546,702 looks like Figure 3.4. In order to express very large numbers, scribes used specific signs which enabled the move from one range to a higher one. For example, the small circle and its cuneiform successor, the oblique wedge (German *Winkelhaken*), were inscribed inside some signs to indicate a multiplying factor of 10. The sign GAL 𒃲, which means 'big' in Sumerian, is not really a number sign, but

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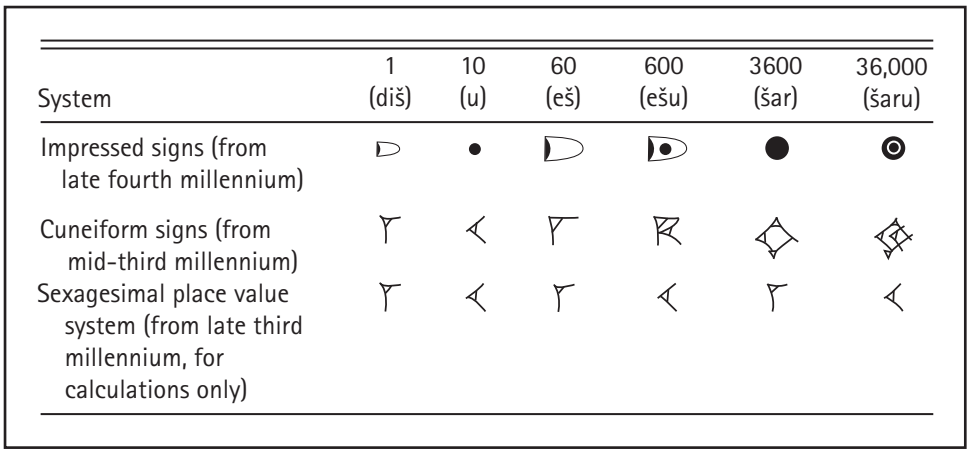

FIGURE 3.3 The evolution of the discrete counting system. (Reproduced from Robson 2008: 76, with permission from Princeton University Press)

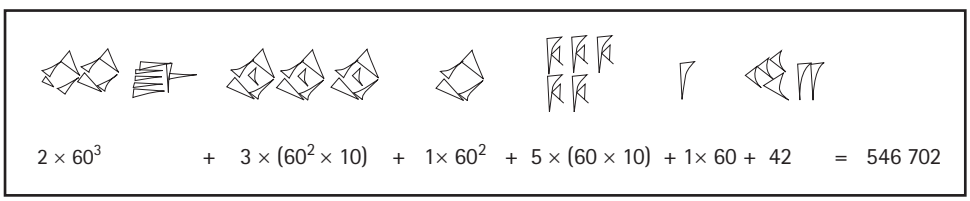

FIGURE 3.4 The number 546,702 in the discrete counting system. (Drawing by G. Chambon)

functions as an indicator for increasing the range of a (group of) number sign(s) by one step. The scribes of the Early Dynastic Period (*c.* 2600 BC), for instance, represented the number 648, 000 with: but never with the repetition .

The functions of the two number-writing systems differed. The sexagesimal place value system was a calculating device, which appears in school exercises, mathematical and (in the first millennium BC) astronomical works, metrological tables, and administrative drafts. The discrete counting system, however, was used to count or enumerate individual objects in discursive or descriptive contexts—administrative, legal, and metrological texts, royal inscriptions, letters, and so on.

This context-dependence of notational systems shows that it is misleading to postulate a strict linear evolution—whether graphic, mathematical, or conceptual—from the discrete counting system, which accompanied the emergence of writing around the end of the fourth millennium BC, to the development of the sexagesimal place value system

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at the end of the third millennium BC. This latter system was not the final step of a process by which the number of signs was reduced to just two. From a strictly graphemic point of view, the vertical wedge in this system derived from the small cone used for the discrete base unit but not from the big cone used for sixty. The oblique wedge derived from the small circle used for ten in the discrete system. However, these two signs were not originally created and conceptualized in order to replace all the different symbols for each power of sixty in the discrete counting system (absolute value system). Rather, each sequence of oblique and vertical wedges corresponds simply to a digit, from 1 to 59 (relative value system).

Metrological signs in mid-third-millennium Ebla

For three millennia, the available evidence shows that both local administrations on the level of cities and supra-regional state administrations developed measurement standards on the one hand, and adopted appropriate signs for recording them on the other. These choices sought primarily to address economic needs and practical realities. They were, moreover, not passive: even if the repertoires of signs may often seem similar from one region to another, their detailed study often shows graphic disparities (in the use of alternative characters) or semantic ones (in the values given to the signs) that were consciously introduced in order to best adapt metrological writings to local practices. Cuneiform documentation from the city of Ebla in northwestern Syria, dating to the 24th century BC, provides a case study to illustrate this phenomenon.

Ebla is the ancient name of Tell Mardikh, some 60 km south of Aleppo in modern-day Syria, which has been excavated by an Italian team since the 1960s. The height of Ebla's political power was in the so-called 'proto-Syrian' period at the start of the second half of the third millennium BC. Over 17,000 excavated tablets give information about the economic, cultic, and diplomatic life of the palace of Ebla (Matthiae 1980; Archi 1986). The city controlled the northwestern region of Syria and represented an important commercial and cultural crossroads connecting Anatolia, the Middle Euphrates, the upper Habur valley, and the Levant.

Ebla offers one of the oldest examples of the adaptation of cuneiform writing in a region where a Semitic language was spoken (Fronzaroli 1982). The geographical distribution of this script was not an inexorable linear evolution; it developed simultaneously in diverse regions and cultures according to very different rhythms (see also Weeden in this volume). Assimilation does not preclude adaptation. At Ebla, in particular, the entire writing system was probably imported from central or northern Mesopotamia, an area often identified as that of the Semitic speaking 'Kiš Civilization', as opposed to the Sumerian tradition of the south. The scribes at Ebla, however, were not content to passively borrow a graphic system. They were able to exploit its potential for change and

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develop their own conventions in palaeography, vocabulary, and grammar (Krebernik 1985). These changes and innovations influenced the later so-called *šakkanakku* style of writing, which was almost certainly used all across ancient Syria at the end of the third millennium BC (Durand 1985).

The set of written signs for capacity units in the Ebla texts fall into two groups, which are distinct both phonologically and functionally. The first comprises 'numeral signs', the principle of which goes back to the invention of writing. Most are defined in two ways: as carriers of both a qualitative and a quantitative value (metrograms). Indeed, the repetition of the same sign refers to both the capacity unit signified—often but not necessarily written immediately afterwards—and its value. The units of measurement are written in descending order from left to right—just as we would write 3 km, 120 m, 50 cm. For example:

še bar *ba-rí-zu*

'3 *gubar* (capacity units) and 1 *parīsu*'.

These signs are equally characterized by their visual simplicity. They are constructed from three simple elements: the cone-shaped impression, the circular impression, and the wedge. By rotating and combining these elements, a repertoire of about a dozen signs was generated:

We also find these metrograms (except for the last two) in texts drawn up in contemporaneous southern Mesopotamia, from where the system must have been borrowed some time earlier.

By contrast, the second group of metrological notations is specific to Ebla (Milano 1990: 349). It consists of the names of capacity units, expressed phonetically in the Eblaite language or with logograms: *gú-bar, ba-rí-zu*, dùn, nì-sagšu, *an-zam*$_x$. These notations are always preceded by metrograms and this feature distinguishes them functionally from the latter: metrograms may in fact be inscribed alone, as their sequence and nature usually suffice to signal implicitly the units of measure.

The study of Eblaite administrative texts, particularly those relating to rations of various products delivered to the king, his family, and his place staff, allows us to reconstruct two very similar capacity systems (Chambon forthcoming):

System 1 with a *gubar* measure worth 120 *assammu* or 20 nì-sagšu

gú-bar (gubar)	1				
ba-rí -zu (parīsu)	2	1			
dùn	5	2 1/2	1		
nì-sagšu	20	10	4	1	
an-zam$_x$ *(assammu)*	120	60	24	6	1

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System 2 with a *gubar* measure worth 120 *assammu* or 24 nì-sagšu

gú-bar (gubar)	1				
ba-rí-zu (parisu)	2	1			
dùn	6	3	1		
nì-sagšu	24	12	4	1	
an-zam$_x$ (assammu)	120	60	20	5	1

Why were there two almost identical capacity systems in use in Ebla? This apparent peculiarity has its origin in the practices of distributing grain rations for making bread or beer in the palace. To facilitate this distribution, the administration usually divided the rations into standard shares which were distributed to particular groups of personnel, such as senior officials, dependent palace workers, or female staff. Most often these standard shares came to 24 or 20 *assammu* measures, for very practical reasons. Thus, a certain category of staff received a daily ration of 1 *assammu* of grain on 24 days a month; the standard ration share could then be delivered in a 1-dùn container with a capacity of 24 *assammu* (System 1). On the other hand, the most common size for a group of people receiving 1 *assammu* of grain each was twenty and in this case, it was more practical to use a 20-*assammu* dùn (System 2) to issue the grain ration for the entire group at once.

An administrative text (Milano 1990: no, 15) provides an example of the use of a nì-sagšu measure of 5 *assammu* (System 2) rather than of 6 *assammu* (System 1):

I.1.	13 2/6 (*gubar*) of grain (for) bread for the workers;
3.	10 *gubar* of grain (for) beer for the workers: 80 'standard shares'
II.1.	in one day.
3.	400 *gubar* of grain (for) bread for the workers;
R.I.1.	300 *gubar* of grain (for) beer for the workers (in 1 month).
II.1.	1 *parīsu* (equals) 12 nì-sagšu

This document has three parts. The first lists the daily quantities of cereals needed to make bread and beer for a certain class of worker (guruš). The second totals these amounts over one month, and the last simply notes that '1 *parīsu* (equals) 12 nì-sagšu'. Each of the 'standard shares' includes 20 *assammu* of grain for making bread and 15 *assammu* of grain for brewing beer:

13 2/6 × 120 =1600 *assammu* of grain for bread
1600/80 shares = 20 *assammu* for one share.
10 × 120 = 1200 *assammu* of grain for beer
1200/80 shares = 15 *assammu* for one share.

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One cannot easily divide quantities of 20 and 15 *assammu* into containers of a capacity of 6 *assammu*. The administration thus preferred to use a 1 nì-sagšu container of a capacity of five *assammu*. A standard share could thus be issued in the form of four containers of 1 nì-sagšu each for bread (4 × 5 = 20 *assammu*) and of three containers of 1 nì-sağšu each for beer (3 × 5 = 15 *assammu*). Our scribe considered it important to document this type of manipulation, and does so with the remark '1 *parīsu* (equals) 12 nì-sagšu' in order to indicate that a *parīsu* measure (= 60 *assammu*) is divided not by 10 nì-sagšu measures of 6 *assammu*, but by 12 nì-sagšu measures of 5 *assammu*. Thus the choice of measurement units, and relations between them, depended heavily on administrative activities. Several almost identical systems could coexist, as long as they met precise daily needs.

Borrowing and adapting signs for measures at Ebla

The repertoire of metrograms borrowed from southern Mesopotamia also bowed to the demands of practice. The Ebla scribes drew widely from a group of foreign metrograms to transform and adapt their own system of measures.

This is particularly true of the signs , , and , whose form explicitly denotes the fractions 1/6, 2/6, 3/6, and 4/6 of the barig capacity measure written in Mesopotamia—also transcribed by Assyriologists as 1 bán, 2 bán, 3 bán, and 4 bán with reference to the bán measure worth 1/6 of the barig. At Ebla, the sign is most often associated with the *parīsu* measure, while the signs , , and refer to 1, 2, 3, and 4 dùn (System 1); that is, to the fractions 1/5, 2/5, 3/5, and 4/5 (System 1) or 1/6, 2/6, 3/6, and 4/6 (System 2) of the *gubar* measure, double the *parīsu*. It is not possible to recognize the fractions of the *gubar* measure in the graphical composition of these signs: they have lost their visual meaning in the move from the southern Mesopotamian capacity system to its Eblaite counterpart.

Why then did the Ebla scribes borrow the vertical cone striped with parallel wedges to designate units of capacity, although this notation did not entirely suit their own system? The answer may lie on the side of absolute measures—that is, in their actual value in litres.

Indeed, one can envisage that the Eblaite capacity units represented by the signs , , and were identical to the capacity units notated in the same way in southern Mesopotamia, that is, 1 bán, 2 bán, 3 bán, and 4 bán respectively. An inscribed jar found by André Parrot in the palace of Mari (M. 1731) and dating from the end of the third millennium BC bears information that may corroborate this hypothesis. The inscription on its surface reads: 'Jar of 1/2 (nì-)sagšu (capacity)' (Chambon 2004). This capacity measure, otherwise unknown in the Mari texts, is no doubt the nì-sagšu of Ebla, which means that the designation for the measure was

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keeping over time; but we have already warned that the absolute values of capacity can change. The inscription on the jar indicates that this capacity measure was still in use at the end of the third millennium BC (Figure 3.5).

Although the neck, shoulder, and a small piece of the upper part are missing, the jar's generally good state of preservation enables us to know its original volume: about 1.5 litres. The capacity unit designated by sagšu was therefore equivalent to about 3 litres, and the associated *parīsu* (= 10 nì-sagšu) to about 30 litres, a value previously proposed for the Hittite *parīsu* measure of the mid-second millennium BC (Powell 2000: 117). If the *parīsu* measure of the Ebla texts already contained 30 litres, and if the contemporary silà was indeed equivalent to 1 litre in southern Mesopotamia, as is commonly accepted, then the equivalence 1 *parīsu* = 3 bán (𒁹) was already valid in the Ebla period. The measurements written 𒁹, 𒁹, 𒁹 and 𒁹 in southern Mesopotamia correspond well to 1/6, 2/6, 3/6 (= 1 *parīsu*) and 4/6 of the *gubar* measure, and this could justify why they were borrowed by the scribes of Ebla.

Based on these values, the *gubar*, dùn, and *assammu* measures would be equivalent to approximately 60 litres, 10 or 12 litres (dùn of 20 or 24 *assammu*), and 0.5 or 0.6 litres (1/6 or 1/5 nì-sagšu) respectively. These results are consistent with the orders of magnitude assigned to containers of capacity 1 dùn and 1 *assammu* mentioned in the lexical lists.

Whatever the reasons for these graphic loans, we must emphasize that, despite some flexibility in the use of notations, this adaptation followed precise scribal rules. To avoid possible confusion, scribes added the name of the measure (for example, *parīsu* or dùn) to the metrograms. And they knew exactly how the distribution of rations was organized, either according to System 1 or 2. Therefore, the codification of cuneiform notations for measures at Ebla was highly responsive to conventions that were largely local.

FIGURE 3.5 Inscribed jar excavated by André Parrot at Mari (M. 1731). (Drawing by E. Robson after Parrot 1959: pl. XXXII)

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Conclusions: New perspectives on the study of numeracy and metrology

This case study has attempted to highlight the complexity of the relationship between material culture, which guides the development of metrological systems that respond to specific needs, and scribal practices capable of borrowing conventional notations from other regions while adapting them to local systems of measurement.

Wherever possible the interpretation of a text containing metrological data thus needs to take into account both the context of its drafting (the conventions of the document, sign repertoires, scribal traditions, etc.) and the context of actual practice (surveying fields, weighing metals, trading grain, etc.). This contextualization, at the level of writing as well as the level of materiality, has become a guiding thread in recent studies of metrology in Mesopotamia. It helps us to better understand the ancients' choices, adaptations, and innovations within specific social and cultural contexts. It is also necessary to relate philological studies to archaeological findings. Recent work demonstrates this new trend in assigning textually attested names to standard types of containers found at various sites (e.g. for the early first millennium BC: Payne 2005; Gaspa 2007). It is thus possible, on the one hand, to understand the precise use of these containers according to the written evidence and, on the other hand, to restore their exact volumes and implicit units of measure.

In the realm of numbers, it is important to question the exact relationship between numeracy and literacy, which should not be considered as opposites, but rather as the products of similar phenomena and practices. This approach even allows for a new way of analysing the origins of writing in Mesopotamia.

Research on metrology and numeracy, even of a basic nature such as the work going back to the time of the first decipherments, regularly brings new results, which themselves give rise to new questions and new research perspectives. These are characterized first and foremost by their interdisciplinarity and necessitate cooperation between historians of science, metrologists, philologists, archaeologists, and epistemologists alike.

Further reading

An accessible and very comprehensive synthesis concerning the relationships between numeracy, literacy and metrology can been found in Robson (2007a; 2007b). Matthiae (2007) is an up-to-date account of the archives of Ebla for the layperson, written by the head of the archaeological team there.

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CHAPTER 4

LEVELS OF LITERACY

NIEK VELDHUIS

Cuneiform writing is a flexible and versatile system that offered both an efficient tool for mundane communication and recording purposes and an intricate symbolic system that invited ancient scholars to explore and research its representational potential. The complex cuneiform system with many signs, each associated with various different meanings and readings, may seem awkward and cumbersome to the modern observer. The historical facts, however, speak for themselves. Cuneiform was used for three millennia; it survived fundamental historical, linguistic, and administrative changes, as well as changes in the uses of writing and it was slow to die centuries after the introduction of alphabetic systems such as Aramaic and Greek.

The cuneiform writing system allowed for many sub-systems—some extremely complicated, others straightforward and easy to learn. This versatility meant that the writing system could be different things to different actors and that its longevity may be explained by the fact that it could fulfil very different needs.

As a prelude, it may be useful to define a few concepts in cuneiform writing. Most cuneiform signs are *polyvalent*, which means that they have more than one *reading*. A *reading* represents either a syllable (*syllabogram*) or a word (*logogram*). When a word is written entirely in syllabograms, that may look like this: *il-la-ak* 'he goes'.

Syllabograms, much like alphabetic characters, represent the sound shape of a word—with the difference that each character corresponds to a syllable, rather than to a single phoneme. Usually a single syllable may be written by various signs, a principle called *homophony*. In transliteration homophones are distinguished by subscript numbers (as in u, u_2, u_3, u_4, etc.). Such numbers are conventional artefacts of modern scholarship and have no meaning as such. They allow the cuneiform scholar to map a transliteration back to a series of cuneiform signs.

Logograms write entire words; they may be complemented by a syllable sign (a so-called phonetic complement) to indicate the proper form. The same word for 'he went' may also be written: DU-*ak* 'he goes'.

The capitals in transliterating DU indicate that this is a logogram, which in theory may stand for any form of the verb *alākum*, to go. Logograms and syllabograms are

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not formally distinguished in the writing system. The sign DU may be used as the logogram for 'to go'—it may also be used as a syllabogram as in *i-du-uk* 'he killed.' Similarly, the sign AK, used as a syllabogram above, may also be used to write any form of the verb *epēšum*, 'to do'. Some signs have many different syllabographic and logographic readings. The sign DU may also be used for the syllables *ṭu*$_3$, *gub, gup, kup, kub, qup, qub*, or *kin*$_7$ as well as for the words *izuzzum* (to stand) and *wabālum* (to bring). In addition there are several rare or specialized syllabographic and logographic readings of this sign, as well as a number of sign combinations with particular readings and meanings. The sign combination UD.DU may stand for the verb 'to exit' (*aṣû*) and the combination A.DU may stand for 'way', or, in mathematical context, for 'times'. The only secure way to determine the correct reading is by context. If a sign combination seems to make no sense, then one or more of the sign readings is likely to be incorrect. Some readings are only to be expected in certain periods and/or in certain well-described contexts. The reading *kin*$_7$ of the sign DU, listed above, appears frequently in Neo-Babylonian and Late Babylonian legal contexts after the list of witnesses in the word *mu-kin*$_7$*-nu* (witnesses), but is otherwise extremely rare.

The examples above are all drawn from Akkadian writing. The basic principle of mixed syllabographic and logographic writing is the same for Sumerian, but the system works slightly differently. Sumerian words are usually written logographically by a single sign or a sign complex, preceded and followed by affixes that indicate morphology, written syllabically. Thus the core of the Sumerian verb 'to build' is du$_3$ with any number of affixes to indicate mood, voice, and aspect as well as other grammatical elements. The form mu-un-na-an-du$_3$ thus means 'he built for him', in the active voice (mu-) with a dative infix (-na-). Orthography leaves a scribe fewer options in Sumerian than in Akkadian. The polyvalency principle, however, is more widely used in Sumerian. The sign MU that begins the verbal form in the example above, may be used for the words mu = year, mu = name, -ĝu$_{10}$ (possessive suffix) = my, or muhaldim = cook—none of these uses is particularly rare or unusual.

Modern sign lists recognize some 1000 individual signs. The number of cuneiform signs fluctuates over time—some signs were abandoned and new signs were introduced. It is not always easy to define (and thus to count) signs because a combination of two or more signs may represent a new sign. Thus, the combination of SI followed by A constitutes the sign DIRI and writes the word for 'to be bigger than' (dirig in Sumerian, or *watārum* in Akkadian). In other instances one sign is written inside a container sign (KA×GAR = GU$_7$ 'to eat'). In some cases such combinations are counted as a new sign, in other cases they are treated as combinations of multiple signs. The number of signs available in cuneiform, therefore, cannot be established with any accuracy. In comparison to other writing systems, such as Chinese, the number of 'about 600' is rather low.

The cuneiform system, described above in its bare outlines, has indeed aspects of extreme complexity. Students of Sumerian dread the appearance of the sign DU, because it may represent so many different verbs (gub = to stand; ša$_4$ = to make noise; du = to

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go—imperfect aspect; ĝen = to go—perfect aspect; tum_2 = to bring—imperfect aspect; de_6 = to bring—perfect aspect) or still assume other readings in nouns of various kinds, as in a-ra_2(DU) = way (or 'times'). One needs a pretty good understanding of context and syntax to identify the right meaning and reading. Some of the complexity in the system comes from its long history. Signs accumulated various readings over the centuries. Some of these were dropped and entirely forgotten—occasionally an ancient reading is preserved in the traditional writing of one specific word.

The complexity of the system may lead one to the conclusion that literacy was hard and required many years of study and was therefore available only to an elite who could afford to spend the time on learning that skill. Recently scholars have rejected that intuition, arguing that writing was used for many mundane purposes, that it was widely available—far from restricted to a small elite (Wilcke 2000; Charpin 2004).

In order to address this paradox it will be useful to distinguish between different types of literacy. In an alphabetic system one may argue that one either knows or does not know the thirty-odd signs used in writing: there is little in between. Even so, social scientists distinguish between various types of literacy, not only involving knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, but also knowledge of proper orthography, skills in using tables of contents and indexes, and other aspects of the conventions and customs that surround the textual universe of the day. The cuneiform writing system allowed for many fine distinctions between types and levels of literacy. In the present contribution I will distinguish between three such types: functional literacy, technical literacy, and scholarly literacy. After describing in brief the evidence for these three types, I will discuss in somewhat more detail the importance of scholarly literacy and finally address the issue of the acquisition of literacy through education.

Three types of cuneiform literacy

Functional literacy

Two authors, in particular, have argued that cuneiform writing was not a matter for specialists, but was widely available in the households of common people (Wilcke 2000; Charpin 2004). Wilcke collected archaeological, stylistic, and orthographic data to argue that private citizens were commonly literate. The archaeological information consists of the relative frequency of text finds in domestic quarters. The information is not as rich as one would wish, because excavations have often focused on palaces and temples, rather than on residential areas. Moreover, textual finds have not always been recorded with such precision that they can be attributed to one specific house. Finally, even when such information is available, clay tablets discarded by their ancient owners have sometimes been used as building material, so that their archaeological findspot does not say much about the original archival context. Even with all these restrictions

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the results are striking. In the Old Babylonian period (for which the best evidence is available) the majority of houses in Nippur and Isin yielded texts, including school texts. Several other sites seem to confirm that picture. Stylistic and lexical data collected by Wilcke indicate that sender and recipient of letters usually wrote and read themselves, rather than through a professional scribe. Again, most of the evidence comes from the Old Babylonian period. Finally, Wilcke surveyed a group of legal documents from the Ur III period, written in Sumerian, which exhibit frequent deviations from the orthographic norm. These documents record private transactions of merchants and demonstrate the availability of cuneiform literacy among people not directly involved with the state bureaucracy.

Charpin (2004) lends further support to the thesis of widespread cuneiform literacy by introducing evidence from Old Babylonian Mari (in present-day Syria) and by discussing the difficulty level of cuneiform writing. According to Charpin's estimate, an Old Babylonian scribe did not need more than 112 syllabograms and 57 logograms to reach full literacy in Akkadian. That is a modest number; however, for minimal literacy one could even do with fewer. Old Assyrian merchants in the 19th century, who had set up trading posts in present-day Anatolia (see Veenhof 2008), used an even smaller syllabary for their administration and correspondence (Charpin 2004: 501). The difficulty of cuneiform as perceived by modern students comes from studying both Sumerian and Akkadian in different periods and across different genres. A private citizen in ancient Mesopotamia who wanted to write (or read) a letter, however, needed to know only the conventions and sign usages of contemporary letter writing. In addition Charpin noted that the complexity of a writing system is not related to literacy rates, as one may observe in modern China and Japan (Charpin 2004: 503; Cooper 1992).

The discussions by Wilcke and Charpin address the spread and availability of literacy and thus aim at the lowest possible level of the knowledge of cuneiform. The concept of functional literacy, as employed here, describes the knowledge of cuneiform that is extensive enough to write or read a letter or an ordinary business document. The search for functional literacy is a search for literacy that is not professionalized, that takes place outside of the great institutions, and that is not aimed at aggrandizing the king, or thinking about the universe, but rather at the mundane issues of accounting and communication.

That most (although by no means all) of this discussion focuses on the Old Babylonian period, is certainly not an accident. In the history of cuneiform writing and literacy the Old Babylonian period introduced many novelties and there is good reason to suggest that in this period the role of writing and literacy changed fundamentally. In the present context we may discuss three such changes: new genres; new formats; and a new writing style. The documentary evidence from the Old Babylonian period differs significantly from the preceding Ur III period by the availability of an astonishing number of genres and text types, many of them entirely new. Among these new genres are personal letters (earlier letters are bureaucratic missives), omen compendia, and mathematical problem texts (Robson 2008: 85–124), to name just a few (see Kraus 1973; in particular 16–18). Among the new formats introduced in the Old Babylonian period one may mention bilingual (Sumerian–Akkadian) texts as well as administrative texts in tabular format (Robson

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2003; 2004). The introduction of the tabular accounts is particularly striking, because the format would have been eminently useful in the preceding Ur III period, providing a much more efficient layout than the ubiquitous linear accounts. Robson (2008: 163) has suggested that the one or two tabular accounts from the Ur III period that do exist represent rough work, rather than a final product. Such rough work may normally have been done on wax tablets (which do not survive), while the final product was presented in the traditional linear format that was acceptable to the bureaucracy for archival purposes. If that is correct, then the Old Babylonian tabular format by itself was not new: what was new was its acceptability for archival purposes. Finally, the new writing style introduced in the Old Babylonian period is the cursive. Again, the most striking aspect of this novelty is the fact that it did not happen much earlier. Ur III scribes produced tens of thousands of administrative notes and one would expect them to develop an efficient handwriting. Instead, Ur III administrative texts are written in a semi-monumental script that is hardly distinguished from the writing style of royal inscriptions.

The transition from the third to the second millennium is thus marked by widespread experimentation in writing and the uses of writing. One may add that this same period saw a revolution in scribal education (Veldhuis 2004) as well as a variety of orthographic innovations (Powell 1974). Robson has argued that the development of tabular accounts (or rather, their absence in previous periods) may be explained by the greater freedom that scribes experienced in the Old Babylonian period. In the preceding Ur III period scribal activity was largely in service of central authorities, which may not have inspired experimentation and renewal. The end of the Ur III period brought political fragmentation and weakness, finally allowing writing to escape from the confines of service to the king and the administration. The close connection between writing and power was not restricted to the Ur III period, but seems true for most (if not all) of the third millennium (see also Visicato 2000). The use of a very precise and detailed writing style, even for ordinary accounts, indicates the role of writing as a tool of power and prestige in the hands of the main institutions—the same institutions that order monumental inscriptions. This opposition between third-millennium writing and Old Babylonian writing is not an absolute one. There was, of course, writing for private or non-institutional purposes in the third millennium, but such uses were derivative. The *raison d'être* of writing was its role as an instrument of institutional power.

The new situation in the Old Babylonian period is one in which writing is unleashed from its institutional reins and put to use in a much wider fashion. The introduction of a cursive script, with abbreviated signs, crowded writing, and unclear sign boundaries, is one of these innovations—an innovation that may have benefited those who had to write large volumes of text. Cursive hands are developed for the ease of writing—at the expense of reading. The development of a cursive indicates a more utilitarian approach (one that puts less emphasis on writing as a symbol of power) but at the same time requires a more intimate familiarity with written texts, a type of literacy that can do away with the kind of tiny details that used to clearly distinguish one sign from another in earlier phases of writing. The introduction of a cursive in the Old Babylonian period may be understood as indicative of a wider availability of functional literacy in the Old Babylonian period.

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Literacy moved out of the institutional settings in which it had been at home for so long and moved into the familial sphere where it was subject to all kinds of experimentation. As a corollary, the availability of private (or familial) writing called for the introduction of a special writing style, suitable for royal writing. The introduction of palaeographic (monumental) writing, as exemplified in the Code of Hammurabi, is thus intimately connected to the introduction of the cursive style. Where writing in the third millennium was more or less by definition royal and/or institutional, in the Old Babylonian period it started to make sense to differentiate between writing styles for different purposes.

Literacy remained in the hands of citizens for most of the rest of cuneiform history. The only period in which one may suspect a near monopoly on cuneiform literacy on the side of the state is the Neo-Assyrian period. In the Neo-Assyrian period the difference between monumental and documentary hands all but disappears again. At the same time, this is the first period in which alphabetic (Aramaic) literacy gained widespread currency. Unfortunately, Aramaic was written on leather and other surfaces that do not survive in the archaeological record, so that we cannot adequately compare the uses of Aramaic versus cuneiform writing.

Technical literacy

Different genres of cuneiform texts tend to have their own orthographic peculiarities. A good example of this tendency is the corpus of omen texts in Akkadian, that begins in the Old Babylonian period and extends to the late first millennium. Omen compendia are stylized as collections of 'if . . . then' expressions, in which the 'if' sentence (or protasis) represents an observation interpreted as a sign and the 'then' sentence (or apodosis) the associated prediction, or the meaning of the sign.

Scholarly texts in Akkadian, such as omen compendia, tend to have a much higher percentage of logograms than letters or administrative documents (or even literary texts). This renders them more difficult to read for the untrained, but not for the specialist. One may compare such usage to technical jargon that can be utterly opaque to an outsider, but provides precision in a succinct and well-defined way to those who work in the field.

One may consider the following example from an Old Babylonian omen compendium (Jeyes 1989: 144):

> BE *i-na bi-ri-it* KI.GUB *ù* GÍR GIŠ.TUKUL GAR-*ma pu-šu-uq* ZAG *iṭ-ṭul la be-e*[*l* GIŠ.GU.ZA GIŠ.GU.ZA *i-ṣa-bat*]
>
> If a Weapon is placed between the Presence and the Path and it points to the Narrowing to the right; one who is not the ow[ner of the throne will seize the throne].

This is an extispicy omen, describing particular features that a diviner may observe on the liver of a sacrificial lamb. Extispicy had its own technical terminology for describing zones of the liver and the various anomalies, discolorations, or protrusions that were deemed meaningful (Jeyes 1989: 51–92; Koch-Westenholz 2000: 43–70). Many of the

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technical terms in these texts are written logographically: *manzāzum*, written KI.GUB 'the presence'; *padānum*, written GÍR 'the path'; and *kakkum*, written GIŠ.TUKUL 'the weapon'. The Akkadian words *manzāzum, padānum*, and *kakkum* all belong to the regular vocabulary, used here in the technical divinatory sense and represented by a specialized technical orthography.

Technical terms and orthographies are found in many text genres. Divination reports, which describe the actual findings of an extispicy procedure, use the same orthographic jargon as the omen compendia. Mathematical texts commonly use logograms for mathematical operators ('times', 'to square') and geometrical figures ('circle', 'rectangular'); ritual texts tend to use logograms for types of altars and incense burners, as well as for the aromatics and other materials offered; medical texts use special logograms for body parts, symptoms (fever, skin marks, etc.), and medical ingredients. Each of these text groups employs special logograms for words that are particularly relevant in their respective corpora.

The technical jargon of these disciplines uses specialized subsets of the available lexicon, or specialized meanings of common words. Similarly, technical orthography does not employ a new writing system, but rather utilizes little used readings, extending the system to accommodate the needs of the specialist. Technical literacy illustrates the flexibility of the cuneiform writing system.

Scholarly literacy

Scholarly literacy involves knowledge of all the ins and outs of the cuneiform writing system and its history. Functional literacy and technical literacy are skills in reading and writing different types of texts. Scholarly literacy refers primarily to the knowledge of the writing system for its own sake, collecting all possible and impossible readings of each sign and sign combination and studying the history of its use and palaeography. Scholarly literacy exhibits the pride of the scribes in their craft, emphasizing and even increasing complexity and demonstrating the joy of discovering rare and unusual features of the system.

Scholarly literacy is found, first of all, in lexical lists. Lexical lists are lists of words or lists of signs, either monolingual (Sumerian only) or multilingual (usually bilingual Sumerian–Akkadian). In what follows I will discuss the evidence from three examples. The list of professions Lu A has a history that extends from the late fourth millennium to the early second millennium and demonstrates an interest in palaeo-orthography. The second example comes from the sign list Ea, which is a systematic collection of all possible readings of cuneiform signs—from very common to otherwise unattested. Finally, palaeographic sign lists, first attested in the late second millennium, demonstrate an interest in earlier sign forms as an aspect of scholarly literacy.

The list of professions Lu A originated in the late fourth millennium and was composed around the same time as the invention of writing. A few Uruk IV level exemplars demonstrate the earliest history of the list; in the subsequent Uruk III period the text

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was largely standardized (Englund 1998). Together with other such lists (lists of birds, fish, trees, foodstuffs, etc.) Lu A standardized and documented the newly invented writing system and provided an inventory of the words and signs to be used (Veldhuis 2006). It is likely that early in the third millennium most of the entries in the list of professions were already obscure and outdated. Rather than modernizing the list, it was transmitted as a scribal heirloom for at least 1500 years.

The long transmission history of Lu A allows us a few glimpses of the interest in scribal circles in historical linguistics and palaeo-orthography, and it allows us to investigate the use and function of such study in Mesopotamian scribal circles.

Among the archaic lexical lists, the list of professions Lu A was by far the most frequently used. The following example represents the first seven lines of one of these exemplars (W 17942, Englund and Nissen 1993: pl. 1). The subscript letter/number combinations in the transliteration (as in GAL_a) indicate sign variants which may either be simple graphic variants or distinct signs—in many cases we do not know enough to decide between those two possibilities. Each line begins with a bullet or item sign (a single impression of the stylus), here represented by ¶.

1. ¶ NAM_2-ŠITA+GIŠ	ruler
2. ¶ NAM_2-KAB	?
3. ¶ NAM_2-DI	chief justice
4. ¶ NAM_2-NAM_2	advisor
5. ¶ NAM_2-URU_{a1}	mayor
6. ¶ NAM_2-ERIN	?
7. ¶ GAL_a-ŠUBUR	swine butcher?

Our knowledge of this early phase of the writing system and the language it represents is, in fact, not nearly enough to support the suggested translation (for an overview see Englund 1998). There are good indications that the list is organized according to hierarchy, and thus it makes sense that it should begin with the word for king or ruler. Other translations are guesses, based upon much later readings of these signs (see Wilcke 2005).

With the progressive publication of more and more archaic administrative texts it becomes clear that many of the titles in archaic Lu A appear in contemporary administrative texts and thus reflect the reality of the social organization of the time (Englund 1998: 105, 108–109).

Lu A was transmitted all through the third millennium—the most recent exemplars date to the Old Babylonian period, some 1500 years after its inception. The same seven lines of an exemplar from Early Dynastic Šuruppak (Fara) reads as follows (Deimel 1923: no. 75):

1. ¶ ŠITA+GIŠ+NAM_2
2. ¶ NAM_2-TUKU
3. ¶ NAM_2-DI
4. ¶ NAM_2-NAM_2
5. ¶ NAM_2-URU

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6. ¶ NAM_2-$ŠEŠ_2$
7. ¶ GAL-DUN

The differences between this version and the archaic exemplar above are more apparent than real. Thus KAB vs TUKU in line 2, ERIN vs. $ŠEŠ_2$ in line 6, and ŠUBUR vs DUN in 7 represent closely related signs and the assignment of readings is more conventional than anything else. In other words, the Fara text, more than half a millennium later, has *exactly* the same text, sign by sign. The Fara tablet is a beautiful exemplar that contains the entire text of Lu A in seven columns on the obverse; it is often used as an illustration in exhibition catalogues, not least because its reverse is used for an intricate pattern of snake figures (Nissen et al. 1990: 154–155).

Some of the entries in the list are well known from later lexical, literary, and administrative texts. According to later lexical tradition the entry NUN-ME (15) is to be read abgal, meaning 'sage'; similarly, GAL-TE (17) represents the word tirum, which means 'courtier'—both appear in Sumerian literary compositions known in Old Babylonian copies. Entry 12, read GAL-BAD×DIŠ, is attested with some frequency in archaic records but then entirely disappears, so that both reading and meaning of the entry remain unclear. In fact, after the archaic period even the *sign* BAD×DIŠ is known exclusively in copies of the list Lu A. The entry and the sign were transmitted and kept alive only because they appear in this traditional list; the sign is not used in any other type of context. Interestingly, entry 12 is also one of the items that is updated or reinterpreted in Old Babylonian copies, where it reads GAL-LAGAR-BAD (or GAL-BAD-LAGAR), which might be understood as 'dead chief lagar-priest.' Dead lagar-priests appear (together with other deceased clergy) in literary texts that deal with funerary rites (see Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2000: 47). Whether this is an acceptable interpretation of the archaic entry seems doubtful, but it is possible that it was understood this way in the Old Babylonian period.

Lu A was not only read and studied in the Babylonian heartland; it was exported to all those areas where cuneiform was used in the third millennium. Several copies of Lu A have been found among the tablets from Ebla and the initial section of the Ebla Sign List (known in two exemplars) follows, in an abbreviated fashion, the entries of the list of professions (see Archi 1987). The following passage illustrates the relationship between the Ebla Sign List and the list of professions Lu A in a relatively well-understood passage of the text.

Ebla Sign List B	Lu A	
40. nagar *na-ga-lum*	102. gal-nagar	chief carpenter
41. aga_3 *a-ga-um*	103. gal-aga_x(DUN_3)	chief wood dresser(?)
42. ašgab *$aš_2$-ga-bu_3*	104. gal-ašgab	chief leatherworker
43. zadim *za-ti-num_2*	105. gal-zadim	chief stone cutter

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The Ebla Sign List adds a pronunciation gloss to the most important sign in the entry. Lu A, 104 (gal-ašgab) is found as ašgab // *áš-ga-bù*; the element gal (chief) is ignored. The passage may suggest that each line is thus subject to comment, but such is not the case; out of a total of 129 lines in Lu A only 39 are commented upon. The glosses often differ from the transliteration conventions used in modern Assyriology, partly because this text is several centuries older than the ancient sign lists that modern conventions are based upon and partly because the Ebla scribes had to use phonemic distinctions valid in their own language. Thus, the gloss *na-ga-lum* for nagar ('carpenter'; line 40) exhibits the well-known interchange of /l/ and /r/ at Ebla.

More importantly in the present context, the Ebla Sign List indicates that Lu A was studied very seriously and that the reading of unknown or rare words was transmitted with the text itself—even to an outpost like Ebla. When in the Old Akkadian period writing spread to Susa and Northern Syria, Lu A was copied there, too, and we may assume that, as in Ebla, scribes studied the text and learned the unusual words and readings.

The Old Babylonian period saw the development of many new lexical compositions which were meant to teach Sumerian in the scribal school. In this context, Lu A (together with several other early lexical texts) was more then ever an anachronism, a remainder of a time past. Several Old Babylonian copies include glosses, indicating readings otherwise unknown (see Taylor 2008; Civil 1983; see Figure 4.1).

Around the middle of the second millennium the literary tradition went through a selection process in which the lexical corpus, Akkadian literature, and Akkadian scholarly texts (divination, medicine, etc.) survived and flourished, but Sumerian literature (with a few notable exceptions) was largely forgotten. Lu A and a number of other early lexical texts fell into the category of texts that was no longer deemed useful. However, various entries in Lu A left their traces in the lexical corpus. These entries were no doubt created in the Old Babylonian period, when Lu A was still copied and studied; they travelled with the lexical corpus and some made it all the way to the first millennium.

One example is the entry ME-EN-MU (Lu A, 61). This entry appears with the gloss en-di-ib in the first millennium sign list Diri in the following context (Civil 2004, 152):

en-gi-iz	EN.ME.GI	*engiṣu*	
		nuhatimmu	cook
en-di-ib	EN.ME.MU	*endibbu*	
		nuhatimmu	cook
en-ku-um	EN.PAP.SIG$_7$.NUN.ME.EZEN×KASKAL	*enkummu*	a priest
ne$_2$-en-ku-um	NIN.PAP.SIG$_7$.NUN.ME.EZEN×KASKAL	*ninkummu*	a priestess

EN.ME.GI (engiz) and EN.ME.MU (endib) are found adjacently in Lu A 60–61; enkum and ninkum correspond to Lu A 63–64. All four entries thus appear in Lu A, but whereas engiz, enkum, and ninkum were at least occasionally used in literary compositions and comparable texts (see Charpin 1986: 379–395), the word endib appears only in a handful

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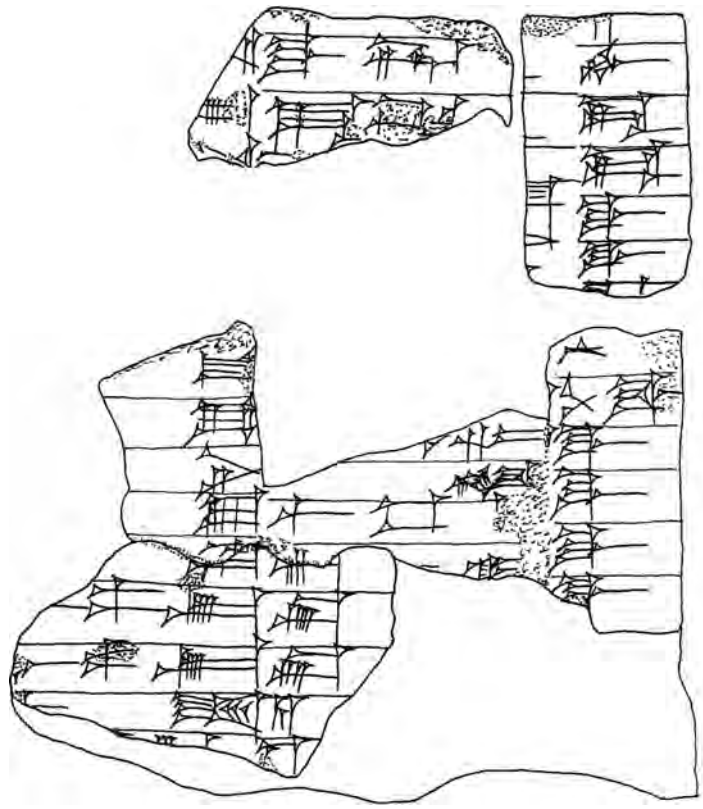

FIGURE 4.1 Fragments of an Old Babylonian copy of the archaic list of professions Lu A. The tablet was excavated at Nippur and is kept in the Babylonian Collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum (N 5566 + N 5583 + N 5651 + N 7441 + N 7454 reverse). (Drawing by N. Veldhuis)

of archaic records and had already lost all relevance early in the third millennium. Somehow, obviously, the knowledge of the word was preserved: it was listed a millennium after Lu A was last copied and more than two millennia after the word had lost its relevance for functional literacy.

This brief history of the list of professions Lu A provides just one example of what was involved in scholarly literacy. Almost all types of lexical compilations provide evidence for the scholarly engagement with the writing system. A second example is the beginning of the sign list Ea from Middle Assyrian Assur (Civil 1979). Ea is a very lengthy list that consists of eight tablets with a total line count of about 2400 entries. It has the format gloss–sign–Akkadian translation. Each sign is taken as the writing for a Sumerian word (represented by the gloss) as well as for an Akkadian word (represented by the translation column). In the transliteration of the sign column (the middle column) the multiplication sign is used to indicate that the second sign is written inside the first sign. In some case the inscribed sign is repeated for clarity (as in line 13).

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1. ¶ e-a	A	*nâqu*	to cry
2. ¶ e-a	A	*rihûtu*	sperm
3. ¶ du-ru	A	*raṭbu*	moist
4. ¶ e	A	KA-KA SIG-GA	(syllable /e/)
5. ¶ eš	A	*mû*	water
6. ¶ a	A	*mû*	water
7. ¶ še-eš	A×IGI	*bakû*	to shed tears
8. ¶ ir	A×IGI	*dimtu*	tear
9. ¶ i-siš	A×IGI	*ṣihtu*	laughter
10. ¶ a-ga-am	A×BAD	*agammu*	marsh
11. ¶ še-du	A×LAGAR*gunû*	*duššû ša mê*	abundant, said of water
12. ¶ e-du-ru	A×A	*aplu*	heir
13. ¶ e-saĝ	A×SAĜ:SAĜ	*aplu*	heir

Signs such as A×IGI (7–9), A×BAD (10), A×LAGAR*gunû* (11), A×A (12), and A×SAĜ (13) never appear outside the lexical corpus. Several of the entries here represent commonplace sign values, such as A (Akkadian *mû*) for water (line 6). The sign A×IGI, however, is an artificial creation from the sign combination A.IGI (A followed by IGI), which has the Sumerian reading ir_2, translated *dimtu* (tear) in Akkadian (compare line 8). The other two items in the A×IGI section represent existing words for 'to weep' and 'laughter' in Sumerian and Akkadian, but these words were never written this way—they are attracted by association. Thus, common entries are mixed with obscure ones that may represent variant readings, old readings, or artificial readings.

The two examples above (Lu A and Ea) exemplify scholarly literacy in terms of collecting and preserving rare words and unusual or ancient sign usages. In addition, scholars were also interested in palaeography. Cuneiform was used over a period of some three millennia and in that long period sign forms changed very considerably.

Lists of palaeographic sign forms start to appear in the second half of the second millennium. They follow the order of the ubiquitous elementary exercises Syllabary A (or S^a) and Syllabary B (or S^b) and usually pair several palaeographic variants with a contemporary sign form. The syllabaries provided a convenient and widely-known paradigm for organizing such knowledge (comparable to alphabetical organization in our times); their use does not imply at all that palaeographic lists have anything to do with primary education. Late second-millennium palaeographic S^a is known from Babylon and Assur and from the Western periphery at Emar, and Ugarit (Gantzert 2006; the Babylon exemplars are to be published by Alexa Bartelmus). First-millennium examples of palaeographic S^a and S^b are attested in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian collections of scholarly tablets. Late second-millennium examples usually list fairly realistic Old Babylonian forms. Some of the Neo-Assyrian exemplars include attempts to identify archaic sign forms from the late fourth millennium (Finkel 1997; see Figure 4.2). Such attempts are rarely successful, but they do demonstrate that scribes of the period encountered very early texts and were curious about them.

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FIGURE 4.2 Neo-Assyrian list of archaic sign forms, accompanied by contemporary signs. The tablet was excavated at Nineveh and belongs to the so-called library of Assurbanipal (British Museum 81-7-27, 49+50; King 1898: no. 7). (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum)

The lexical tradition largely consists of the technical handbooks supporting scholarly literacy, much in the way that divination compendia are the technical handbooks of diviners. This large corpus of lists of various kinds and formats has only a tangential relationship with functional literacy. These are the encyclopaedias that document and demonstrate the width and depth of the cuneiform writing system. Scholarly literacy does not refer primarily to the ability to write scholarly texts, but rather to the knowledge of the history and possibilities of the cuneiform system in the widest sense of the term. Scholarly literacy made the writing system into an object of scholarly knowledge and research.

The uses of scholarly literacy

The preceding section illustrated the multiplicity of literacies in cuneiform. A literate person was not necessarily able to read (or write) each and every text; much of the knowledge of the writing system in scholarly circles had nothing to do with reading and writing as it established a field of knowledge all by itself. The place and function of scholarly literacy is a topic that goes far beyond the confines of the present paper. I will briefly indicate a few areas.

Scholarly literacy, including the knowledge of palaeographic sign forms, was used primarily in colophons, in royal inscriptions, and in speculative genres, such as commentaries and related texts, that sought to find or insert a deeper meaning in a traditional cuneiform text.

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Colophons appear in copies of traditional texts and may include information on the scribe, his sources (the origin of the tablet that he copied), and the composition (title, tablet number, and/or number of lines; see Hunger 1968). Middle Babylonian and later colophons tend to use rare logograms and other complicated writings. Šaggar-abu, the copyist of a number of scholarly tablets at Emar, wrote most of his colophons in palaeographic signs (Rutz 2006). The scholarly texts themselves are written in the regular sign forms of the time. The colophon is the place where the scribe identified himself and established the link between the scribal tradition and his person as a scribe. The use of palaeography in these colophons emphasizes the link to the past that is embodied in the scribal tradition.

The use of palaeography in (monumental) royal inscriptions is a common phenomenon in the second and first millennia (indeed, in most writing traditions) and is not in need of much discussion. A single example, therefore, will suffice. The statue inscription of Kurigalzu I in Sumerian (Veldhuis 2008) from the first half of the 14th century BC uses sign forms that are more or less comparable to Old Akkadian palaeography—about a millennium earlier. The sign forms used in the Kurigalzu inscription not only differ significantly from contemporary administrative writing, they also have little in common with the palaeography of the land grants written on stone monuments from approximately the same period (see Slanski 2003). Kurigalzu's inscription is interesting because it demonstrates on various levels the connection between royal legitimation, scholarship, and the past. Composing a long and non-standard inscription in Sumerian was certainly a scholarly tour de force for Kurigalzu's scribes. They used the lexical tradition for finding the Sumerian words that they needed and they clearly did their best to find rare and unusual words. The statue and its inscription remind the observer of the great kings of the past (Sargon, Hammurabi) who left their own inscribed monuments, some of them still standing tall in the 14th century, providing a frame of reference for Kurigalzu's statue as well as for his kingship. Language, writing style, and the monumentality of the object itself converge in a message of royal legitimation. The inscription talks about the traditional Sumerian gods for whom the king reinstalled the proper rites. The scribe or scribes who produced this inscription used their scholarly knowledge of Sumerian (religious) traditions and cuneiform palaeography in order to create a line of continuity from time immemorial to king Kurigalzu, upon whose image their text was inscribed. A special feature of the Kurigalzu statue inscription is the occasional use of very unusual archaizing spellings, reinforcing this scribal sense of antiquity and continuity.

First-millennium scribes, Assyrian and Babylonian, were interested in writings of the past. They copied earlier inscriptions, faithfully preserving the ancient writing style, frequently adding a colophon in contemporary cuneiform (see Hallo 2006). An unusual case of the use of palaeography is found in a Neo-Babylonian ritual text from Sippar (Maul 1999), which is written in a regular neo-Babylonian hand, with the exception of just three signs (LI, MU, and NA). The palaeographic forms are used only in the titles of Sumerian prayers, or in the name of the cultic drum (*li-li-is-su*). A fragment of a historical text in archaic palaeography from Neo-Assyrian Kalhu has only partly been deciphered (Finkel 1997), owing to the aberrant sign forms utilized.

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The use of palaeographic sign forms is related to authority, power, and scholarship and represents the authority of the past. By studying and employing earlier sign forms the scribes not only maintained the accessibility of ancient texts, in particular publicly accessible monumental texts, they also added a layer of complexity to the writing system, which could be used to set a text apart from ordinary writing.

Much more complex is the use of scholarly literacy in commentary texts and related genres. Such texts use the polyvalency of cuneiform signs as well as the inherent (Sumerian–Akkadian) bilingualism in order to interpret or reinterpret a traditional text. A well-known example concerns the sign GI in an omen text; the example derives from a commentary to the astronomical series *Enūma Anu Enlil* entitled 'When the moon at its appearance' (Koch-Westenholz 1999: I 68–71):

> If the moon's horns at its appearance are very dark:
> disbanding of the fortified outposts, retiring of the guards;
> there will be reconciliation and peace in the land.
> (...)
> GI means 'to be stable' or 'to be dark', GI means 'to be well'.

The commentary, which is quoted in various reports by astronomers to the Assyrian king, basically explains why darkness of the moon's horns (the two ends of the moon sickle) can be interpreted as 'Its horns are stable' and why this relates to peace or well-being in the prediction. The connection between the words 'to be dark', 'to be stable', and 'to be well' is that all can be equated with a logogram that has a value GI. The equation GI = *kânu* = 'to be stable' is indeed common throughout the cuneiform tradition. 'To be dark' may be written GI_6. And finally *šalāmu* 'to be well' is related to *šullumu*, 'to repay' or 'to compensate', which equals the Sumerian expression šu ('hand')...gi_4 ('to return'). The commentary thus uses complex associations between signs and words in which homographs (GI, GI_4, and GI_6) may substitute for each other in order to demonstrate the connection between Akkadian equivalents.

This type of speculative analysis may have been quite common in first-millennium scholarly circles (see Frahm 2004) and has been described as an early precursor to rabbinic exegetical methods (Cavigneaux 1987; Lieberman 1987). It allowed scribes to explain away difficulties in traditional texts and enabled them to see connections where no connections were readily available. Such reading of cuneiform texts required an extensive scholarly knowledge of the writing system. The passage listing the fifty names of Marduk, at the end of the so-called Babylonian epic of creation (*Enūma Eliš*) provides explanations for each of those fifty names, borrowed from learned god lists, in much the same fashion (Seri 2006).

Literacy, education, and scribal identity

Most of what we know about scribal education in Mesopotamia clearly aims at scholarly literacy, involving the knowledge of an ancient language (Sumerian), including obsolete words and rare orthographies. This scholarly literacy was part of what one may call an

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elite cultural literacy that included knowledge of the literary heritage of the time. Functional and technical literacy, on the other hand, were probably mainly acquired through apprenticeships. Formal scribal education was not primarily focused on the practical skills of reading and writing, but rather on the formation of a scribal identity that transcended boundaries of time and place.

The most abundant and coherent evidence for scribal education comes from the Old Babylonian period from the city of Nippur, where thousands of exercise tablets have been unearthed. One type of school tablet, particularly common at Nippur, contains two separate exercises, one on the obverse and one on the reverse. The obverse extract is the new assignment, the reverse repeats material that the pupil already knew by heart. This arrangement allows researchers to establish the curricular order of the Nippur exercises, which were largely standardized and are sometimes known in hundreds of duplicates. One may summarize the Nippur curriculum as in Table 4.1 (and see Figure 4.3).

The reconstruction of the Nippur curriculum is schematic and varied in detail from one teacher to another (Robson 2001). This elementary curriculum was followed

Table 4.1 The Nippur curriculum

Sign exercises	
Sign elements	Tablets filled with horizontal, vertical, and oblique wedges
Syllable Alphabet B	Standardized sign exercise, introducing the most important cuneiform signs with lots of repetition
Tu-Ta-Ti	Sign list; triads of signs with alternating vowels (u-a-i); used by some Nippur teachers
Thematic lists	
Lists of names	Various lists of Sumerian and Akkadian names
Sumerian nouns and nominal phrases	Trees and wooden objects, reeds and reed objects, ceramics, hides and leather objects, metals and metal objects, animals, meat cuts, stones, plants, etc. (in six chapters)
Advanced lists	
Acrographic lists	Lists of Sumerian words ordered by first sign (compare alphabetic listing)
Advanced sign lists	Lists of signs with all possible readings (even very rare ones); list of special sign combinations (compound signs)
Numerical exercises	
Metrological lists and tables	Weights, lengths, volume, etc, in standardized format
Mathematical tables	Multiplication tables and reciprocal tables
Phrases and sentences	
Sumerian proverbs	Multiple collections, using rare words and sign values acquired in earlier exercises.
Model contracts	Realistic contracts, without witnesses or date

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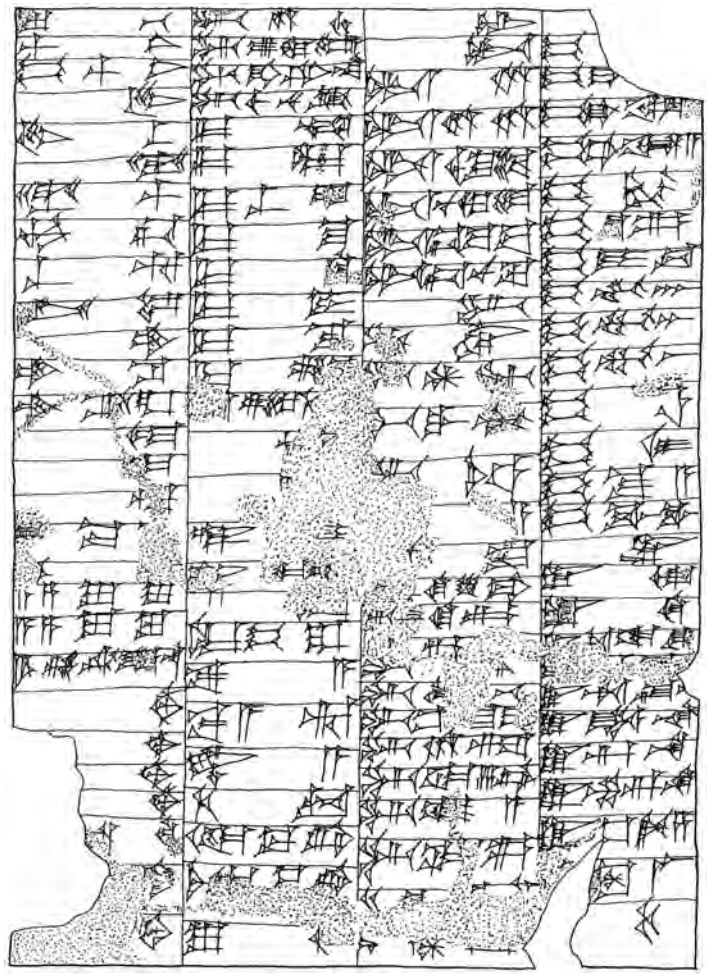

FIGURE 4.3 Old Babylonian school text: list of animals. The tablet was excavated at Nippur and is in the Babylonian Collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum (UM 29-16-31 reverse). (Drawing by N. Veldhuis)

by the study of Sumerian literature, a vast array of hymns to gods and kings, narrative texts (heroic as well as mythological), and light-hearted compositions such as *The Debate between Hoe and Plough* (ETCSL 5.3.1).

The curriculum included a number of things that were valuable or necessary for functional literacy. The sign exercises were as important for learning literary Sumerian as they were for any scribal purpose. The lists of names were very important for functional literacy because names are frequent in letters and administrative texts (much less so in literary texts) and they often use irregular orthographies. The numerical exercises were of prime importance for administrative purposes; in particular for dealing with the various systems of metrology and their relationships. The model contracts have not been studied in detail and their relevance for scribal practice cannot be established as yet. Old

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Babylonian cities each had their own local formulary and it seems likely that model contracts would follow local practices.

Although individual exercises may thus be relevant to various kinds of literacy, the structure of the curriculum aims at the last and most complex level: Sumerian literature. All these exercises prepare a pupil for reading and understanding a literature in a dead language, a heritage in Sumerian.

A more detailed examination of the lexical exercises drives this point further home. The lexical texts are not simply a concordance of the literary corpus. In fact, they contain much that is never found in Sumerian literature—or anywhere else. An analysis of the list of birds (a subsection of the thematic word list) shows that virtually all bird names that are found in the literary corpus also appear in the lexical list (Veldhuis 2004). Of the more than 120 entries in the list, however, fewer than half are ever attested anywhere else. This means that the Sumerian vocabulary and orthography itself were considered important enough to be taught and transmitted. The literary corpus represented a Sumerian heritage, referring to a largely imagined golden era when all of Babylonia was governed by one king. The Sumerian language and its orthography were equally important symbols of that glorious past in their own right—worthy to be saved from oblivion.

This analysis of Old Babylonian curriculum applies to Nippur, but may be extended to other scribal centres of the period. Other sites have yielded far fewer school tablets, but the exercises that we encounter more or less fit the Nippur pattern. The general structure of scribal education appears to be approximately the same in all Babylonian cities.

It is likely that functional literacy and technical literacy were not taught in a formal classroom setting, but rather through apprenticeships (see Robson 2008: 52–53). In general, scribal apprenticeship pieces are difficult to distinguish from common scribal output. Some Old Babylonian letters have been identified as school letters because they are found in duplicates or near duplicates (Kraus 1959). Similarly, some Ur III administrative texts have been classified as exercises, rather than real administrative records, because of their suspiciously round numbers, because they exist in multiple duplicates, or for other reasons (see, for instance, Englund 2004: 39 and n.22). There are various reasons why such exercise documents and letters are not very numerous. First, they use the same formulary, the same conventions, and the same format as real documents because that is exactly their point: to train the student how to do it properly. Our chances of distinguishing between real documents and the products of a trainee are therefore relatively low. Second, whereas real letters and documents may have been filed and kept safely for at least some period of time, there was no reason to do that for exercise documents. Finally, apprentices may have started relatively early in drawing up real documents under the supervision of their master, so that the whole distinction between school texts and archival texts collapses.

The acquisition of the practical skills needed to write a proper letter or to compose an administrative account may, therefore, be largely invisible to us. The rich school tradition that we encounter in the cuneiform record is not primarily concerned with such issues, but rather with the creation of a scribal identity. The scribes became the

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guardians of a Sumerian heritage, which included the knowledge of a literary canon as well as a scholarly knowledge of the writing system in all its manifestations.

Conclusions

Cuneiform writing started around 3200 BC and finally died out in the 1st century AD (see Brown 2008; Cooper 2008). The longevity of the cuneiform writing system, even long after alphabetic scripts had been introduced to Mesopotamia, may be perceived as a problem in the history of writing. Cuneiform, however, had a number of distinct advantages over other writing systems. The versatility of cuneiform allowed for various levels and types of literacy to exist side by side within a single system. The historical depth and the potential complexity of cuneiform could be exploited in a variety of ways to distinguish between ordinary writing and special writing or between ordinary scribes and scholarly scribes.

If writing were about efficiency and simplicity, the cuneiform system could have developed into an efficient and simple syllabographic system—as it did in Old Assyrian times. The Old Assyrian experience, however, remains an isolated case and the history of cuneiform shows that complexity was an asset that was valued.

Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, an Old Babylonian Sumerian epic poem about the legendary ruler of Uruk, relates how Enmerkar invented writing (Vanstiphout 2003; ETCSL 1.8.2.3). The story describes a conflict between Uruk and Aratta, an El Dorado somewhere in the East, across seven mountain ranges. The narrative serves to describe Sumer's (Uruk's) superiority, not so much in terms of military power but in terms of technology. In the course of this very long poem messengers are sent from Uruk to Aratta and back; each time the lord of Aratta promises that he will submit to Uruk, if only Enmerkar fulfils an impossible task. As it turns out, Enmerkar, because of Sumer's superior technology, is able to fulfil these tasks. In the third and last exchange Enmerkar decides to take a piece of clay and write down his message, rather than dictating it to his messenger, thus inventing the art of writing. The poor lord of Aratta has no idea what to do with the tablet and its markings, thus confirming his inferiority. Whether this story accurately reflects Old Babylonian beliefs about the origins of writing is immaterial. The passage eloquently conveys the pride that Old Babylonian scribes took in their profession. This pride in their scribal knowledge, which they shared with generations of scribes from time immemorial, is what cuneiform literacy is about.

Further reading

Charpin (2008) is an excellent recent overview of literacy in Mesopotamia, while Vanstiphout (1995) discusses the relationsip between literacy and memory in cuneiform culture. Civil (1995) is an introduction to the principles and contents of Mesopotamian lexical lists.

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CHAPTER 5

LITERACY AND GENDER

BRIGITTE LION

> I recited my tablet, ate my lunch, prepared my (new) tablet, wrote it, finished it; then they assigned me my oral work, and in the afternoon they assigned me my written work. When school was dismissed, I went home, entered the house, and found my father sitting there. I told my father of my written work, then recited my tablet to him and my father was delighted…When I awoke early in the morning, I faced my mother and said to her: 'Give me my lunch, I want to go to school.' My mother gave me two 'rolls' and I set out; my mother gave me two 'rolls' and I went to school. (*Schooldays*, ll. 4–22, Kramer 1949; 1956: 10–11; ETCSL 5.1.1)

The text translated by Samuel Kramer is known from numerous exemplars, primarily from houses in Nippur where scribal apprenticeship took place (Robson 2001: 54). Its editor called it *Schooldays* because it humorously describes the work and daily life of a young scribe. It belonged to an ensemble of early second-millennium Sumerian compositions on the same subject, which are often commented on for the insights they give into the history of education. It is probable that the 'schools' they describe do not reflect the reality of the Old Babylonian period, when teaching took place in domestic dwellings; apprenticeship in writing was often transmitted from father to son, sometimes from master to student (Charpin 1999: 218–220; 2008: 61–95; Tanret 2004; George 2005).

Kramer presented this text, for a general readership, in a series of 'twenty-five firsts in man's recorded history', the subtitle of his book *From the Tablets of Sumer*. Even if it is a fiction, this account gives several interesting insights. The father devotes himself to intellectual activities and is probably literate himself, as he tests his son's school work. The mother makes the meal. It could be titled 'the first familial division of labour'. Further, the texts of this type seem to have had the status of exercises; by copying them the young scribes were meant to master Sumerian, which, in the early second millennium, was already a dying language, primarily reserved for religious and literary use. One could thus also see in this story, 'the first gender stereotype in a school textbook'…

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Now, this representation leads us to suppose that writing was the preserve of men: father and son discuss in their own territory, from which the mother is absent. This apparent exclusion of women from written culture needs to be nuanced, however, from different points of view. In mythological texts goddesses, more than gods, have mastered writing and calculation; and in the human world, composing literary works, commissioning the carving of an inscription, writing practical texts, and keeping archives are all varied possibilities for participation in written culture, which all to various degrees involved people of both sexes. The following discussion emphasizes achievements attributed or attributable to women, as previous studies on the question of literacy have not always taken into consideration the relationships that women could have with writing.

Gods, goddesses, and literacy

In Sumerian mythology it is a goddess, Nisaba, who looks after the scribal art; she patronizes the activities of writing and calculating (Michalowski 2001). The kings themselves assert her protection. A hymn to king Lipit-Eštar of Isin, in the early second millennium, vaunts his wisdom, which he owes to the goddess:

> Nisaba, the woman radiant with joy, the true woman, the scribe, the lady who knows everything, guides your fingers on the clay: she makes them put beautiful wedges on the tablets and adorns them with a golden stylus. Nisaba generously bestowed upon you the measuring rod, the surveyor's gleaming line, the yardstick, and the tablets which confer wisdom. (ETCSL 2.5.5.2, ll. 18–24)

At the end of their writing exercises, trainee scribes often added, 'Glory to Nisaba!'.

Eleanor Robson (2007) has analysed the references to writing, calculating, and the tools for carrying out these techniques, that figure in apprentice pieces copied by young scribes in the Old Babylonian period. In the divine world these activities are more often associated with goddesses than with gods, through explicit mentions of the scribal profession or through relationships with writing tools (clay, tablet, writing-board, stylus, seal) and measuring devices (ropes and other surveying instruments, for example). Unsurprisingly, Nisaba is the most frequently attested in the corpus, but a dozen other goddesses seem to demonstrate the same competencies, notably Inana and Ninlil. Amongst the gods, the most frequently mentioned is Haya, Nisaba's spouse, but the most important gods of the Sumerian pantheon appear very rarely in this type of activity. According to Tikva Frymer-Kensky (1992: 32–44) the link which the goddesses maintained with the arts and writing, wisdom and knowledge, can be explained by the fact that the management of household goods, within the framework of domestic activities, was often in the hands of women and entailed processes of audit and accountancy. Similarly, in the world of the dead, we find a goddess scribe, sometimes called Ninazimua, sometimes Geštinana, sometimes Belet-ṣeri (Katz 2003: 174, 365–366, 397–401), whose

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specialization could also be explained by the fact that she evolved in the entourage of a goddess, Ereškigal, ruler of this kingdom, in the image of female scribes who were at the service of human queens and palace women (Lion 2009a; and see further below).

Over the course of the second millennium Nisaba was little by little replaced in her role as scribe by a male god, Nabu; by the first millennium she rarely appears at all. This loss of importance is the general lot of female divinities. The eminent Arad-Ea family of royal land-surveyors dedicated their seals to Gilgameš's divine mother Ninsumun, 'majestic land registrar of Enlil', until at least the 14th century, while Gula is described as 'keeper of accounts' in a slightly later Akkadian hymn (Robson 2008: 166–176). The causes of this phenomenon are complex. The decline of the towns where these goddess were venerated, such as Nisaba's city of Ereš, could be one explanation (Lambert 1987); just as competition from other goddesses, like Enlil's consort Ninlil, absorbed the worship of Nisaba and ended up eclipsing her (Michalowski 2002).

In the cities and kingdoms of Mesopotamia, in all periods and despite of the fact that the patron of their activities was a goddess, the large majority of scribes were men. Frymer-Kensky (1992: 41) notes, however, that the divine world could to some degree reflect the human world, and notes that 'the constant parallelism between goddesses and women should alert us to the possibility of women's contribution to the development of scholarly learning'. This contribution deserves a closer examination.

Commissioners of inscriptions, royal and non-royal

The term 'inscriptions' is ambiguous when used in connection with the documents written in Mesopotamia, because all of them, being engraved in three dimensions, can be described thus. By convention, however, this word is reserved for texts engraved on particular media, such as nails, cones, prisms, etc. (see Taylor in this volume), or made in a material other than clay, such as stone or metal. Their contents affect a certain solemnity, because they have a votive or commemorative aim. Dominique Charpin (2008: 229–256) defines them as 'messages for the gods and for posterity'. Those addressed to the gods often figure on objects placed in temples—for example, bowls or statues, which carry the name of the dedicator; letter-prayers (see below) have been compared with these inscriptions, because they have the same recipients and the same goal: to attract the benevolence of a deity.

For these inscriptions, as for the literary texts mentioned below, there is the problem of composition: rulers sometimes claimed to be their authors but, even when put in the first person, they were probably conceived and realized by professional scribes (Cooper 1999: 233). The persons who ordered the inscription had the means to pay an artisan to make a particular object and an engraver to add a text to it; they thus belonged to a social elite who, literate or not, attributed a particular value to writing. Now, numerous women belonged to that group (Lion 2008: 57–62; Gadaut 2009; Figure 5.1).

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FIGURE 5.1 Calcite vessel from Ur, *c.* 2050 BC, with an inscription of Šuqurtum, one of king Šulgi of Ur's *lukur*-women, (British Museum, ME 116430; Frayne 1997: 3/2.1.2.85). (Photo by Karen Radner. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.)

In Inanna's temple in pre-Sargonic Nippur, cups and vases were offered by women who sometimes indicated their husband's or their own position or status: one of the dedicators was a midwife (ša$_3$-zu) (Braun-Holzinger 1991: 132, G97; Steible 1982: 238). Under the Third Dynasty of Ur, as well as in the Old Babylonian period, several women from the families of senior officials dedicated inscribed objects (plates, cups, beads, etc.) for the life of kings (Frayne 1990; 1997). The princesses of the Lagaš dynasty, in the 21st century, had at least twenty-five inscriptions engraved on objects for the ruler's life (e.g. Edzard 1997: 173–174, 176, 178–180, 189–190, 197–202).

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The princesses consecrated to the god Nanna at Ur have left numerous inscriptions that were found where they resided, in the *gipar* of Ur. Enheduana, Sargon of Akkad's daughter (*c.* 2300 BC), is the first to have left such a testimony, on an alabaster disc one of whose sides bears a text and the other a relief showing the priestess carrying out her duties (Winter 1987; Frayne 1993: 35–36). We also know of other inscriptions ordered by priestesses belonging to the royal families of Akkad, Lagaš, and Ur III.

The inscribed objects are often votive offerings, extremely diverse in nature and appearance, the most spectacular of which are inscribed statues. When it comes to female statues, the donor is always a woman (Braun-Holzinger 1991: 219); for the Early Dynastic period, of a corpus of ninety-two inscribed statuettes, there are just six of women, and their inscriptions are very short and damaged. But it is not certain that the inverse is true: some statues of men could have been offered by women, if one believes the copy of an inscription of the woman Ea-niša, secondary wife of king Šulgi, which says she had a statue made of her husband the king (Frayne 1997: 179–180). This poses the problem of whether particular objects were chosen according to the dedicator's sex. The commonest, such as bowls and beads, were offered by individuals of both sexes. A triangular plaque found in Ištar's temple in Assur and dedicated by a woman represents female genitalia (Grayson 1988: 46); but in the pre-Sargonic period the wife of a king of Umma offered the god Šara a golden plaque in the shape of a beard (Frayne 2008: 371). In the 21st century, queen Ninkagina of Lagaš dedicated weapons six different times (Edzard 1997: 189, 199–201); one of them is to Šul-šagana, three others to Kindazi, two to deities belonging to the family or entourage of Ningirsu, the warrior god. It is perhaps necessary, then, to seek the reasons for the dedicator's choice on the divine side, not the human.

Certain objects are characteristic not of the person who offers them, but of the nature and the function of the text that they carry: this is very clear for foundation inscriptions which traditionally figure on clay cones and nails, bricks, and tablets of stone or metal. The repair and construction of buildings concerns rulers, in all periods, to the point of their being considered as the prerogative of 'builder kings'. Exceptionally, under the dynasties of Isin and Larsa, this prerogative was extended to the daughters, sisters, and wives of kings. The relatively sophisticated inscriptions of these women follow the model of royal construction inscriptions, with an identical rhetoric. For example, the text on a foundation nail of Enanedu, daughter of Kudur-mabuk and *en*-priestess of Nanna, starts with the exaltation of the princess's qualities and her religious role, which is equivalent to a titulature (Charpin 1986: 1999–206; Frayne 1990: 299–301; Figure 5.2). Another text of hers, on a stone tablet, finishes with a series of curses (Frayne 1990: 224–231). Enanedu affirms, moreover, that she has been chosen by the god to build him a temple, which is a common trope in royal inscriptions.

Several inscriptions commissioned by women are preserved in copies made in the Old Babylonian period. One tablet from Nippur collects copies of twenty-one inscriptions which must have figured on votive objects offered by the kings of Ur and by members of their family, perhaps kept in the Ekur temple in Nippur. Amongst them are three made by women of the royal family (Frayne 1997: 86, 179–181). The scribe who recorded these texts

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FIGURE 5.2 Cone with an inscription relating the construction work undertaken by the *en*-priestess Enanedu at Ur in the early second millennium BC. (British Museum, ME 130729; Frayne 1990: no. 4.2.14.20). (Photo by Karen Radner. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.)

in the early second millennium BC copied male and female inscriptions alike, without assigning a particular place to the latter on his tablet. Since the practice of female dedicators still existed in his era, he must have considered it normal for earlier dynasties too.

After the fall of the kingdom of Larsa, for almost a millennium all known inscriptions seem to have been commissioned by men, but this may be due to the accidents of discovery. In the Neo-Assyrian period, Sammu-ramat, spouse of Šamši-Adad V (r. 823–811) and mother of Adad-nerari III (r. 810–783), together with her son, left an inscription on a stela recording a military expedition to Syria, in which she took part with the king (Grayson 1996: 204–205). The name of this queen was recorded by Greek and Roman historians as Semiramis. Another exceptional woman, Naqia/Zakutu, wife of Sennacherib (r. 704–681) and mother of Esarhaddon (r. 680–669), also commissioned inscriptions (Melville 1999). One of them, known in three exemplars, commemorates the construction of a palace in Nineveh for her son Sennacherib, while all other palace constructions catalogued are in the names of kings. Hers is shorter than the male royal inscriptions of this type, even if it replicates the standard formulary. Two other texts of hers, known through copies, were engraved on jewels offered to goddesses, and a third on a bead. Some stele from Assur carry the names of queens, such as Sammu-ramat and Libbali-šarrat, wife of Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c.* 630). We should also mention the funerary inscriptions found in the queens' tombs at Nimrud, one of which is on the sarcophagus of Mullissu-mukannisat-Ninua, who was the wife of Assurnasirpal II (r. 883–859) or Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824), or perhaps wife of the former and mother of the latter. Others are on tablets left in her tomb and that of Yaba, wife of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–727). Objects inscribed with the names of the queens, and those of other women, were also deposited in their tombs. But it is difficult to know if these women were themselves behind these types of inscriptions (Fadhil 1990a; 1990b).

There is an evident disproportion between the mass of documentation of male origin and the tiny number of women's inscriptions. But the male inscriptions are often the work of kings, who occupied a completely separate place in society. Should we compare

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the inscriptions of men with those of women, or those of the king with those of other individuals, whatever their sex? In the latter case, the place taken by women in the production of inscriptions is far from negligible.

Male and female authors

On tablets recording acts of everyday life, scribes often indicate their name. By contrast, for documents we categorize as 'literary' that is not the case. Ancient Near Eastern literature, whether in Sumerian or Akkadian, remains a matter of anonymity (Lambert 1957; 1962; Foster 1991; Michalowski 1996: 183–185; Glassner 2009). Texts were transmitted by a process of successive copying or recalling from memory for Sumerian literature, which sometimes tended to modify the original. The copyists thus participated in the development of compositions, so it does not make much sense to search for unique, original authors, successive authors and editors having merged over time. In the first millennium, scholars associated certain works with gods, kings, or ancient sages and the work was conceived to have been composed, inspired, or approved by the gods. Thus the *Epic of Erra* is presented as written by one Kabti-ilani-Marduk from a revelation sent to him by the god Išum. Names retained by tradition are rare. There is Lu-Inana, for instance, author of the *Tummal Chronicle*, a Sumerian composition known from Old Babylonian copies (Oelsner 2003; ETCSL 2.1.3). Saggil-kinam-ubbib's name is given as an acrostic in the form of the initial syllables of each verse of a long poem now called the *Theodicy*. Other names are reported by the tradition, such as that of Sin-leqe-unninni, associated with the *Epic of Gilgameš* in a library catalogue of the first millennium; this personage also appears as the ancestor of a scholarly family from Uruk, up until the Seleucid period (Clancier in this volume).

The few names known are almost all masculine. However, sometimes women are credited with the composition of literary works (Lion 2008). Enheduana, daughter of Sargon of Akkad and consecrated as *en*-priestess to the god Nanna of Ur, is the most ancient of the known traditional 'authors' (J.G. Westenholz 1989; ETCSL 1.3.2, 4.07.2, 4.07.3, 4.13.02, 4.13.03, 4.80.1). She is associated with compositions dedicated to the goddess Ištar, to the moon-god Nanna, and to the city of Ur, and with a compilation of forty-two hymns to all the temples of Sumer and Akkad, which ends with the notice: 'Enheduana is the compiler of this tablet' (ETCSL 4.80.1, l. 543). To date, all of these poems are attested only in Old Babylonian manuscripts, written some five centuries after her death.

Enheduana's work as author, or at least as compiler, is accepted by some researchers (Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 2–3; Sjöberg and Bergman 1969: 5; J.G. Westenholz 1989: 548–549), and Aage Westenholz (1999: 76) has written that 'she is in fact the first real author, in the modern sense of that word, known to world history'. By contrast, W.G. Lambert (1970; 2001) thinks that a scribe could have composed the poems and placed them under her authority to please her, as did the scribal authors of royal inscriptions, written in the first

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person and supposedly emanating from the sovereign. The hymn to Inana *Innin šagurra* (ETCSL 4.07.03) dates to the Old Babylonian period according to its grammar and vocabulary and thus cannot have been attributed to Enheduanna until several centuries after her death (Civil 1978: 229; Michalowski 1998: 65). Finally, several of the temple hymns concern buildings constructed after the end of the Akkad dynasty, so Enheduana's work of compilation may have comprised only the last hymn of the collection, not its entirety (Black 2002).

Whether Enheduana's qualities as poetess are real or secondary is not essential for our interests. The same questions could be posed about the hymns presented as the works of the kings of Ur or Isin: should they be attributed to the ruler himself or to one of his scribes? Certain kings, such as Šulgi of Ur (r. 2094–2047) and Lipit-Eštar of Isin (r. 1934–1924), claim to have mastered writing (Frahm in this volume), and there are no strong reasons to doubt their claims. But all kings, literate or not, had scribes at their service. The essential point is that in antiquity unusual men, such as rulers, or a woman such as Enheduanna, exceptional because of her high birth and religious duties, could equally be regarded as authors. This idea, even if it dates only to the end of the third or the beginning of the second millennium BC, supposes a conception of written culture and poetry that, at the level of the most powerful elite, did not exclude women.

No woman's name is closely associated with any literary work of the Third Dynasty of Ur, but several researchers have suggested attributing various poems to women. Thus the *Death of Ur-Namma* (ETCSL 2.4.1.1), recalling the death of the dynasty's founder (r. 2112–2095), could have been composed by his spouse Watartum according to Claus Wilcke (1970: 84–86). Love songs addressed to kings, in particular to Šu-Suen (r. 2037–2029), could well be the work of a 'woman poet', whether the queen or another court lady (Jacobsen 1987: 85–87). Finally, the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods saw the flowering of Sumerian compositions that sing of the love between Inana and Dumuzi. Jerrold Cooper (1997) has suggested that certain of these express a feminine sensibility and a female approach to sexuality.

The Old Babylonian period saw the development of the letter-prayer genre, both Sumerian and Akkadian examples of which are known (Borger 1957–71). They comprise letters addressed to a deity to ask a favour, deposited in front of its statue. The sender may be a king or a wealthy individual. One of these letters, in Sumerian and addressed to the goddess Nintinuga, is sent by the lady Inanaka. She complains of an illness and begs the goddess to save her from it (Römer 2003; ETCSL 3.3.10). This letter closely resembles others of the same type, sent by men, to request a cure. Both its structure and its subject matter are completely comparable with them: exaltation of the goddess, presentation of the sender and his or her difficult situation, request for health, and promise of recognition of the deity (Böck 1996).

The Sumerian letter-prayers belong to a scholarly curriculum: Inanaka's is known from over a dozen manuscripts. The Akkadian letters, by contrast, are often known only from a single manuscript; their style is more or less elaborate and they were not necessarily integrated into the tradition of scribal apprenticeship. Apart from numerous Old

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Babylonian examples (Hallo 1998; Foster 2005: 215–220), all attributed to men, an Old Assyrian letter-prayer from Assur has been identified, addressed to the goddess Tašmetum by the lady Akatiya (Kryszat 2003). As in the case of Inanaka's letter, the supplicant addresses herself to a female deity, while the men's letters are directed equally at gods and goddesses.

Close to letter-prayers in their style, other petitions were sent to kings to ask favours of them. Thus Ninšatapada, daughter of king Sin-kašid of Uruk (r. *c.* 1865–*c.* 1833) and priestess of Meslamtaea, underworld god of the town of Durum, addresses herself to Rim-Sin, king of Larsa (r. 1822–1763), after his victory over her father (Hallo 1991). In her long letter in highly poetic Sumerian, she sings the conqueror's praises and appeals to his benevolence to reinstate her position, which she says she lost five years before. She presents herself as an elderly woman and as a munus dub-sar, 'woman scribe' (line 16). As Hallo (2006: 88) has noted:

> Ninšatapada, or whoever was the 'author' of our letter-prayer, wrote it in response to a real historical situation, and wrote it, moreover, in full knowledge of the requirements of royal phraseology. This phraseology of the court scribes I would like to designate the 'chancery style'.

This style was notable enough for the letter to become part of the scribal curriculum: it is known in six copies.

It is difficult to say whether the senders of letter-prayers and petitions, men or women, were truly their authors, or if 'court scribes', or at least professional scribes, actually composed them (Michalowski 1996: 185). The only name which has passed down to posterity is that of the sender, whether male or female. This signifies, once again, that both men and women were supposed to be able to resort to writing (directly or not) and to present highly elaborate requests to gods and kings. The absence of distinction between men and women, from this point of view, is perhaps due to the universality of the subjects broached in these letters: illness spares no one; political vicissitudes touch on men especially but can also affect priestesses of royal blood. By contrast, the royal letters (as opposed to the letter-prayers) studied by apprentice scribes at the same period all had male senders and recipients. That is the case for the entire royal correspondence of Ur, whose degree of authenticity is debated (Huber 2001; Hallo 2006), and the letters of the kings of Isin. The majority of these concern the kings and their senior officials, whether civil or military, and treat administrative and military matters, domains in which women did not generally intervene.

Professional scribes

The profession of scribe is much better attested for men than for women. Until the middle of the third millennium BC, all the documented names are masculine (Visicato 2000). Female scribes are identifiable, however, in limited numbers, over a long period from the end of the third millennium to the second quarter of the first (Lion 2008: 62–65).

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The oldest reference to a woman scribe, named Nin-UN-íl, appears in a ration list from the Ekur temple in Nippur, during the Akkad period (A. Westenholz 1999: 70 and n. 325). A second such scribe (dub-sar) appears in an account document from Ur III Umma, one part of which concerns wages paid in beer, bread, and flour to men and women, whose professions are sometimes indicated (Oppenheim 1948: 21–22).

At the beginning of the second millennium BC, there are many more attestations of women scribes, especially at Mari and Sippar. At Mari, in the palace archives, we find several mentions of them in the economic texts which record distributions of oil and wool to different groups of women, and in lists which contain only female names, those of members of the royal family and their domestic staff (Ziegler 1999: 91–92). After the princesses, the king's wives, and the various categories of female musicians (see Ziegler in this volume) come the female sweepers, scribes, servants, bakers, millers, etc. There are in total nine women scribes (DUB.SAR.MEŠ). Many of them have Sumerian names, just like their male counterparts. Four lists mention two or three female kitchen-scribes (Ziegler 1999: 106), to whom we should perhaps attribute the hundreds of 'royal meal' tablets that have been found.

A dowry tablet of Šimatum, daughter of king Zimri-Lim (r. 1775–1762) and wife of the king of Ilanṣura, records, after numerous jewels, garments, and pieces of furniture, the princess's retinue, which is composed of eight women including a scribe (^{munus}DUB.SAR) called Šima-ilat (Kupper 1983: no. 322). The roughly contemporaneous palace archives of Chagar Bazar in upper Mesopotamia have also yielded distribution lists of grain rations for domestic staff: amongst them we find mention of a woman scribe, Abi-libura (Talon 1997: nos. 67, 75, 80, 86). The custom of employing female scribes in the palaces of Syria and upper Mesopotamia is thus well attested. Their abilities did not necessarily give them a prestigious position: they had servile status and the female population of the palace had recourse to them probably in order to limit their contact with male personnel.

The tablets of 19th and 18th century Sippar document a different aspect of the scribal profession. In this case they belong to private archives that record the transactions of wealthy individuals of the city. Amongst the social elite were the *nadītum*, women consecrated to the god Šamaš, who were forbidden to marry and reproduce. Their houses were grouped in a walled city quarter designated by the Akkadian term *gagûm*, access to which was controlled by gate-keepers. As the offspring of well-to-do families, upon their religious consecration they received a considerable dowry, including land, which they managed themselves. It is in this context that women scribes worked, drawing up legal contracts and court records for the *nadītum* (Harris 1975: 196–197; Lion 2001; 2009b). At the end of these documents the scribe wrote the list of witnesses and then her own name. Nearly twenty female scribes are thus known. They did not designate themselves explicitly as *nadītum*, but at least some of them must have been, as they bear characteristic names that pay homage to the god Šamaš, his divine spouse Aya, or to their daughter Mamu. Examples include Amat-Šamaš and Amat-Mamu ('Servant-woman of Šamaš/Mamu'), Aya-kuzub-matim ('Aya is the charm of the land') and Šat-Aya ('She who belongs to Aya'). They sometimes give their patronym and they must have been free

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women. Their specialism is explained once again by an interest in limiting the presence of men in a relatively closed female environment, whilst access to writing remained indispensable. We know, however, of two texts drawn up by women scribes in which only men took part in the transaction or litigation in question (Dekiere 1994: no. 129; Lerberghe 1982). Nevertheless, the immense majority of texts written in Sippar were written by men (see, e.g., Tanret 2004). That is true even in the context of the *nadītum*s: during the reign of Samsu-iluna (r. 1749–1712), a man, Awil-Adad, even held the title 'scribe of the *nadītum*s' (Harris 1975: 197, 285). The inhabitants of Sippar, *nadītum*s included, who needed the services of a scribe, did not necessarily choose a person of the same sex as themselves.

It is perhaps also from Sippar that the four Old Babylonian school exercises come, at the end of which the student has indicated that she is female by the note ŠU ^{munus}DUB.SAR '(written by) the hand of a female scribe' (Lion and Robson 2005; Figure 5.3). They witness the various phases of apprenticeship, from the simplest sign lists to Sumerian literary compositions. The education of girls was thus exactly identical in content and level of difficulty with that of boys. This seems unremarkable, since men and women went on to write exactly the same types of tablet. However, this note is perhaps an indication that the girls were conscious of preparing themselves for a profession that was very male-dominated. We do not know the place or framework of this education; we might suppose a family apprenticeship, as Inana-amamu, one of these female scribes, was herself the daughter of a (male) scribe. These very rare exercises, just like the products of the professional female scribes, show that as well as the 'schoolboys' evoked in Sumerian literary works, there must have been 'schoolgirls' too.

For a millennium after the Old Babylonian period, we know of no further female scribes, which in itself does not prove that they had disappeared; this silence could be due to the accidents of source preservation, and to the lesser density of palace archives

FIGURE 5.3 Writing exercise, now known as Syllable Alphabet A, written by a girl, probably in Sippar, *c.* 1750 BC (British Museum, ME 96950). The colophon simply reads 'hand of a female scribe', followed by the date (Lion and Robson 2005). (Photo by Karen Radner. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.)

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from this period. For it is in the palace context of the Neo-Assyrian empire in the 7th century BC that we find once again two mentions of women scribes (Villard 2009). The first appears in a list of nearly 200 women, found at Nineveh (Fales and Postgate 1992: no. 24; Radner 1997: 86). Some are designated by their profession: there are musicians, bakers, metallurgists, and six scribes (6 munus A.BA.MEŠ). This list recalls those from Mari and it is possible that it concerns the female population of the palace, at least in part. The same text mentions stewardesses, and another some female treasurers, who perhaps knew how to read (Fales and Postgate 1992: no. 26). Finally, right at the end of the Neo-Assyrian empire, in 615 BC, two texts from Kalhu (Nimrud), relating to the archives of the queen's household, mention Atar-palṭi as a creditor in some silver loans; she is designated as 'scribe of the queen's household' (lú A.BA*tú* *ša* É MUNUS.KUR or A.BA*tú* É MUNUS.É.GAL; Dalley and Postgate 1984: nos. 39 and 40, pl. 10; Radner 1997: 83, 88, 100). These scribes seem to have been dedicated primarily to the administrative management of the queen's household, while the ladies of the court used the services of male scribes. Issar-duri, in Naqia's service, even held the title 'scribe of the queen mother' (lú A.BA *ša* munus AMA.LUGAL, Kwasman and Parpola 1991: no. 253).

Reading and writing

It has often been repeated that the very difficult cuneiform writing system was the preserve of a small group of professionals. Indeed, the number of people who had access to written culture, in relation to the total population, must have been a very small minority. Piotr Michalowski (1996: 191) has noted, in relation to literature, that:

> The world of Mesopotamian writing is, by definition, far removed from the everyday world of the streets. Texts were written not in the vernacular but in scribal languages—often dead ones. As a result, the texts only spoke to, and for, a small minority of the population, primarily the male bureaucratic classes, including part of the priesthood, even though the extent and the quality of literacy probably changed from period to period and from place to place.

If one cannot but subscribe to this nuanced approach, recent studies tend to show that, apart from the scribes, a certain number of people did know how to read and write (Wilcke 2000; Charpin 2008: 31–60). A few kings boasted of it, such as Šulgi king of Ur (r. 2094–2047), Išbi-Erra king of Isin (r. 2017–1985), and Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c.* 630) (see Frahm and Zamazalová in this volume). These kings claims have never been seriously doubted. The names of Assurbanipal's tutors are known, and the colophons of some tablets indicate that they are copies made for the prince's study, or are even attributable to Assurbanipal himself (Villard 1997). On a bas-relief from Nineveh, the king wears a stylus in his belt, designed to write on waxed wooden writing-boards (Seidl 2007; see Taylor, in this volume). Assurbanipal's father, Esarhaddon (r. 680–669), apparently received the same type of education.

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However, these kings are often taken as the exceptions who vaunt their competencies all the more readily for being so rare. Now, Dominique Charpin has recently indicated that the king of Mari Išme-Dagan (r. 1953–1935) probably knew how to write (according to a study by Nele Ziegler) and that Zimri-Lim (r. 1775–1762) must have known how to read (Charpin 2008: 49). Further, the senior officials of the palace of Mari, as well as his generals, seem to have had the same skills. There are multiple indications of this: the handwriting of the letter-writers; the use of the verb *šaṭārum*, 'to write', rather than the related *šušṭurum*, 'to have someone write'; and the verb *amārum*, 'to see' a message, rather than *šemûm*, 'to hear', which supposes that the letter is read aloud by a third person. In this context, if we suppose that reading and writing were practised not only by kings but also by their immediate entourage, there are no reasons for women not to have had the same access to writing. In this light it is hardly surprising that a princess like Ninšatapada calls herself 'scribe' in her supplication (see above). In the Neo-Assyrian court, the princesses also had to be educated in writing, if we are to believe a letter from Šerua-eṭirat, Assurbanipal's sister, to the latter's wife (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002: no. 28), inciting her to learn to write and recite her tablets. This indicates that 'the ladies of the royal family must have acquired scribal skills as well as the princes' (Villard, 2009; cf. Zamazalová in this volume).

According to the Mari documentation, the most important figures of state were capable of understanding omens without themselves being professional diviners (on whom see Charpin in this volume): kings, senior officials, and certain women of the royal entourage like Addu-duri, mother of king Zimri-Lim, and Šibtu, his wife (Durand 1988: 53–54, 61–62). Now the 'reading' of the liver, ominous medium par excellence at the beginning of the second millennium, is a technique as complex as reading a tablet and the two disciplines—divination and the scribal art—were not without affinities. Divination was perceived as the reading of a message sent by the gods, inscribed on the sacrificial lamb's liver or, for astrology, in the movements and appearances of the heavenly bodies, etc. (for both, see Koch and Rochberg in this volume). In both cases, it is a question of understanding systems of signs. And these two techniques could be useful for the power elite: the king and his entourage, male and female, could thus access it, if not as true professionals then at least well enough to enable them to check the professionals' statements and to discuss matters with them.

The merchants' communities were also social categories in which reading and writing were prevalent, for practical reasons: when the merchants travelled they needed to write to their partners and their families but did not necessarily have scribes available to them on their journeys; further, they might wish to keep their own accounts, or at least to check them. Even those of the Ur III period, who wrote in Sumerian and thus had to master a considerable number of signs, could have known how to write, according to Claus Wilcke: tablets from Nippur demonstrate a frequent use of simplified syllabic spellings (Wilcke 2000: 34–49, 66–80) and mention few names of professional scribes. But the most abundant and richest merchants' corpus dates to the Old Assyrian period. It comprises groups of records written in Akkadian, found in the houses of Kültepe (ancient Kaneš) in Cappodocia, where merchants had settled to sell cloth and tin for silver. According to M.T. Larsen (1976: 305):

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> there are indications that a great many Assyrians knew how to read and write (…). The system of writing was highly simplified with only a limited number of syllabic signs and quite a few logograms, and many of the outrageously hideous private documents constitute clear proof of the amateurishness of their writers. We know for certain that some of the sons of important merchants were taught the scribal art.

Among these letters, often riddled with mistakes in grammar and syntax, are missives sent by women (Michel 2001: 419–511). A characteristic of women's letters is the sender's lack of inhibition in expressing feelings and in appealing to those of the (male or female) addressee (Larsen 2001). Finally the word *lapātum*, a technical term which means 'to write' a tablet in Old Assyrian dialect, is used of women in at least two instances (Michel 2009). Merchants from Old Babylonian Larsa were also credited with this knowledge (Larsen 1987: 220 n. 51).

The skills of reading and writing do not seem to have been limited to this sole socio-professional group. Claus Wilcke (2000: 23–33, 51–65) systematically sought references to reading and writing in 3200 Old Babylonian letters. The verb *amārum*, 'to see', used in connection with a tablet, assumes that the person holding the object is able to decipher it. It is found in 194 letters and this frequency shows that direct access to reading was quite widespread. Of these 194 occurrences, five concerned women. The same goes for writing: the verb *šaṭārum*, 'to inscribe' a tablet, evokes an action by the subject of the verb, not the use of a scribe. Wilcke has found thirty-five such occurrences, including three women as subject. We find the same terminology in and about legal documentation. In a trial record that relates a dispute about an inheritance, the family of the deceased accuses a woman of having written a false will herself, in her own favour; witnesses attest on the contrary that the dead woman wrote her own will during her lifetime, but in neither case is there mention of either woman using a scribe (Pinches 1896: no. 47, quoted by Wilcke 2000: 32, 64).

Even if there is no direct relationship between the number of signs in a writing system and the literate proportion of a population, the use of a restricted number of signs can only facilitate learning. Now, the Old Babylonian syllabary does not use many signs, barely more than the Old Assyrian (Charpin 2008: 53). An example of an apprenticeship in writing by a non-professional is attested by the excavation of a house in Sippar-Amnanum: that of Ur-Utu, who succeeded his father as chief lamenter (Tanret 2002 and in this volume). Eighty exercise tablets were discovered there, over half of which were found, in secondary context, in the courtyard where the learning could have taken place. The student, probably Ur-Utu himself, was not destined for the scribal profession and the tablets he wrote are only from the early stages of the curriculum. Perhaps his training was more useful to him as the eldest son of the family, heir to numerous possessions that he had to manage, than as a lamenter. Indeed, no tablet documents his training in this area: his father, Inana-mansum, must have educated him orally in the knowledge he needed. Another, slightly older, case of education in a priestly family is known from the discoveries at the house called No. 7 Quiet Street in Ur (Charpin 1986: 420–434): the inhabitants, Ku-Ningal and his sons, belonged to a family of purifiers of the god Enki, migrants from the city of Eridu, and Dominique Charpin thinks they undertook educational

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activities at home. The multiple school tablets found there reflect an advanced stage of learning, unlike the tablets found at Ur-Utu's house. Religious personnel were thus able to read, write, and in some cases to teach. That could also be true of some religious women: school texts were found in a house in Old Babylonian Sippar which contained the archives of a *qadištum*, Humṭi-Adad, and her brother. Lucille Barberon (2009) proposes to attribute them either to the *qadištum* or to the students, male or female, that she would have taught.

In short, it appears that in the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian periods a significant part of the social elites, including women, could read and write. For the Neo-Assyrian period, Simo Parpola showed that a provincial governor must have been able to send a simple letter to the king, suggesting that 'the level of literacy in first-millennium Mesopotamia was at least as high (if not higher) as in earlier times' (Parpola 1997: 322). However, it is unclear if women—apart from royal women—also had access then to this knowledge.

Archives

A final aspect of the relationship with writing is the matter of its conservation. The oldest archives found in Mesopotamia are predominantly those of 'major institutions', temples and palaces, which produced substantial administrative documentation. With regard to the palace, the king was naturally at the head of the royal domain, but some women of the royal family also managed—at least nominally—estates, including land, livestock, and workers, and certainly had a great economic importance. The best-known example from the middle of the third millennium is the 'woman's household', dependent on the queen of Lagaš, documented in nearly 2000 tablets found at Tello in southern Iraq. Although the most recent of the tablets refer to the 'household of the goddess Bau', it remained the queen's province, under the goddess's patronage. However, there is no indication that the queen maintained the archive herself and it is unclear to what extent she was involved in its management. In addition, there must have been a royal household, much wider in its remit, whose documentation has not been found.

Similarly, in the Ur III period, an assemblage of about 500 tablets recording incoming and outgoing livestock, probably from Puzriš-Dagan (Drehem), is associated with the name of Šulgi-simti, one of the wives of king Šulgi. But here again, did Šulgi-simti herself manage these transactions? 'The tablets do not seem to have been written by or dictated by a woman. While the livestock foundation was headed by a woman, that is, Šulgi-simti, in its day-to-day operations, it was run by men' (Sharlach 2007: 366–367). It is therefore unclear whether we should treat the documents mentioning Šulgi-simti as her 'archives'. It is similarly difficult to estimate whether the archives were 'public' or 'private', and whether these distinctions are, in this context, really relevant.

The distinction between public and private archives is clearer from the beginning of the second millennium: the number of texts in private dwellings increases dramatically.

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The archives of Old Assyrian merchants at Kaneš testify to this, as do groups of tablets excavated from urban houses in central and southern Mesopotamia (Wilcke 2000: 7–22). Indeed, the largest domestic archive found so far dates to the Old Babylonian period: that of Ur-Utu, comprising nearly 2000 letters, contracts, and administrative texts (Gasche 1989: 42; Tanret in this volume). The phenomenon persists into the following periods (Pedersén 1998). These archives are less 'private' than familial: in fact, they concern the management of assets, especially real estate, that are transmitted over generations. The tablets, which acted as titles to property, were carefully preserved, sometimes for more than a century.

That a person keeps his or her tablets at home does not mean that he or she is able to read, but it does shows the massive importance of writing in legal and social life, for a large portion of the population from the beginning of the second millennium. Keeping tablets served to establish one's rights over a property. Therefore it is not surprising that most of the excavated archives seem to have been preserved by men, because women were often excluded from land ownership, and the purchase of low-value movable property did not give rise to the writing of a contract. In the case of the Old Assyrian merchants, women kept an eye on the household archives in the absence of their menfolk, and when a colleague or representative of their husband was brought here to take a tablet, the women oversaw the operation (Michel 2009).

The *nadītum*s of Šamaš at Sippar may constitute an exception: they owned land, rented houses and fields, and willed their property. Many tablets record their transactions as well as the legal cases they won. Unfortunately, the precise origin of their documents is very rarely known. The idea that their 'archives' were unearthed in their houses in the cloister is based on the content of the documents, but it is not clear that the *nadītum*s kept their property records at home. Some were able to keep their purchase contracts, but dowries and inheritance contracts were sometimes deposited with male members of their families. A long text (Figulla 1967: no. 63) for instance shows a *nadītum* entrusting all her tablets (dowry and inheritance contracts, legal records) to her uncle, who stored them at home and lost them; the tablet was then written to replace all the lost documents. Such situations explain why tablets of the *nadītum*s of Šamaš were found not only in Sippar-Yahrurum, where the temple of Šamaš and the 'cloister' were to be found, but also in nearby Sippar-Amnanum (Barberon 2009).

Women could be legal participants in all kinds of transactions. Some possessed seals (Figure 5.4), which they used in the same way as men in contracts that concerned them (Michel 2009). However, when seals have no writing on them but only images, the identity of the owner remains uncertain. A woman might, for example, use the seal of a man from her family. The iconography of female seals might differ from that of male seals and vary depending on its owner's profession. At Urkeš, in the third millennium, the seal of Zamama, the royal children's wet-nurse, shows her performing her duties, as does the female cook's seal (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 1995–96). According to Claudia Suter (2007), the iconography of the seals of priestesses (and their servants) at the end of the third millennium is also related to their function. However, in Old Babylonian Sippar, male and female seals show the same scenes (Colbow 2002).

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FIGURE 5.4 Cylinder seal (and its modern impression) of Pu-abi, queen of Ur, *c.* 2600 BC (British Museum, ME 121544). (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website (http://tinyurl.com/aqsdql).

Conclusion

Women seem to have had access to reading and writing that was comparable to men's in the ways they used them. The women of the elite, especially those of royal families, could commission inscriptions, compose or commission literary texts (or have them attributed to them), and some could read and write. Some archives deal with the management of their estates. Female professional scribes are well documented.

The distinctions of gender, in terms of access to written culture, are thus not relevant from a qualitative point of view. They are, however, from the quantitative point of view, which is undoubtedly due to the social uses of writing. The majority of letters were exchanged between men, because men much more than women were expected to travel, particularly because of their profession (administrators, merchants). Men, rather than women, managed property, particularly real estate, so most contracts were concluded between men and also written by men. The very existence of female professional scribes can sometimes be explained by particular social circumstances: they worked especially in environments to which few men had access, such as the palace, the queen's household, or at Sippar, the *nadītum* district.

For the rest, access to writing is probably less an issue of gender than of membership of a professional or cultural context, and of social status. Most of the population, who spent their lives in agriculture or artisanal activity, had no need for writing, whether they were men or women. But in court circles, in the world of merchants, and among the members of the 'clergy', nothing seems to have prevented women from having access to writing in the same way as men.

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Further reading

General information about reading and writing cuneiform are to be found in Charpin (2008), Michalowski (1995), and Wilcke (2000). Lion (2008) and Lion and Michel (2009) provide the reader with an overview of the relationship between women and writing (women as scribes, commissioners of inscriptions, owners of tablets, etc.). Frymer-Kensky (1992: 32–44) and Harris (1990) focus on the involvement, respectively, of godesses and women in activities connected with wisdom, arts, and sciences. J.G. Westenholz (2006) discusses priestesses as authors of literature. Lion and Robson (2005) deal with the education of literate women, whereas Robson (2007) studies references in Sumerian literature to godesses and women involved in scribal and mathematical activities.

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PART II

INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

This section begins and ends with a challenge to the assumption that two key aspects of modern Western culture—individuality and liberty—were lacking in the ancient Near East. In Chapter 6, Ben Foster demonstrates that cuneiform literatures contain ample sources for the notions of person, of self, and of the individual, while in Chapter 10, Eva Von Dassow shows how ideas of rights and liberty formed part of the conceptual architecture of ancient Near Eastern communities. She employs the term 'community' in a broad political sense, arguing that its autonomy and the liberty of its individual members are, as values protected by divine sanction, deeply engrained in Ancient Near Eastern culture.

Foster's focus lies on the individual and, for him, the body is the essential person. The key to surviving beyond death was provided by the individual's name. First and foremost, the family were obliged to provide for their dead ancestors by regularly invoking their names as part of their death rites (Radner 2005: 74–88). A genealogical text serving as an aide-memoire for one such remembrance ceremony in honour of ancestors serves as key piece of evidence in Chapter 7. Here Frans van Koppen explores the family background of young Ipiq-Aya, from a prominent family in Old Babylonian Sippar, who wrote out a copy of *Atram-hasis*, the Babylonian Flood Story, as part of his scribal training. This extended family of scribes, merchants, and judges was united by their worship of Ea, god of wisdom and the benefactor of the survivors of the Flood in

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Atram-hasis. Van Koppen's chapter provides a rare insight not only into what cuneiform literature could mean to one individual but also into how the members of a kinship group communicated and demonstrated their shared identity. Cylinder seals, those ubiquitous tools and emblems of Mesopotamian urban life, played a key role. Van Koppen's reconstruction of Ipiq-Aya's circle also uncovers a personal and educational link with Ur-Utu, the lamentation singer whose fortunes Michel Tanret traces in Chapter 13, highlighting the web of relationships which connects Sippar's leading families and shapes the community's identity. Ur-Utu also kept mementos of his ancestors.

While the family was central to the commemoration of the individual, those who had the means tried to ensure that not just their own family but the entire community would remember their name. The public banquets held in memory of a wealthy landowner and local dignitary, as discussed by Hagan Brunke in Chapter 8, were one way to achieve this: the whole community came together to feast in honour and remembrance of the dead. Recent anthropological and archaeological literature has focused on the use of food to negotiate status, a strategy found in all human societies (Schiefenhövel and Wiessner 1996), and its role in the shaping and maintaining of social hierarchies (Bray 2003). Communal feasts play a prominent role in this: not only is food received according to rank but the human body itself is an instrument of status differentiation during such feasts. That is, by occupying a certain space in a certain position and attitude one signifies a particular social status (Keating 2000: 308). Much of this burgeoning literature implicitly engages with issues of memory (Holtzman 2006), and the link between feasting and remembrance emerges clearly also from Brunke's chapter. Collective feasting as an important and regular feature of the life of the community is particularly well attested in the Ur III period, and Brunke's chapter demonstrates and applies the methods needed to make terse administrative records speak about a wide range of subjects, from cultic practice and social stratification to cooking recipes and diet.

Cross-cultural comparisons may provide fruitful impulses for the direction of future research. For example, feasting practice in early Chinese society, surviving until today in the shape of the Qingming festival, suggests that forming and maintaining alliances with the dead, who were considered active participants of the cult community, was just as important as the interaction between the living participants, if not more so (Nelson 2003). The Mesopotamian dead, too, partook in the feasts held in their remembrance and their 'happiness' was of interest to the entire community. For, if neglected through a failure to provide offerings and invoke their names, their spirits were thought to turn into phantoms without identity who would leave the netherworld to haunt the living (Radner 2005: 19–21). These angry ghosts were held responsible for all sorts of misfortune, to the individual and the community. In Chapter 20, Daniel Schwemer discusses strategies to pacify and dispose of them.

Cultic communities are also the topic of Chapter 9, in which Michael Jursa studies the priestly, or 'prebendary', families who jointly controlled the Babylonian temples and earned their livings by that means. Again, food played a crucial role, as most of their income from the temple was payment in kind (misinterpreted as food rations in earlier

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scholarship) and because many of the priestly offices were responsible, as bakers, brewers, and butchers, for the preparation of the food offered to the gods as part of the regular temple cult (Waerzeggers 2011: 153–271). Bound inextricably by tradition to cuneiform culture, these communities, whose focal point was—socially, economically, and culturally—the temple, were responsible for the majority of textual sources surviving from the Neo-Babylonian and subsequent periods. Philippe Clancier, in Chapter 35, surveys the same milieu, but with a focus on the Hellenistic period. The temples were subject to royal authority; Caroline Waerzeggers' Chapter 34 on royal participation in cult and worship thus provides a different view on these same communities.

The locus of the individuals and communities studied by Brunke, van Koppen, Jursa, and Von Dassow is the city, and Foster also stresses the urbanism of Mesopotamian civilization, calling its cities 'the salient, soaring features of the level, productive Mesopotamian landscape'. While Heather Baker's Chapter 25 on the architectural fabric of the city adds another dimension to the focus on urban Mesopotamia, Frans Wiggermann's Chapter 31 on 'agriculture as civilization' provides a fitting companion and counterweight to the contributions in this section.

Further reading

The Mesopotamian city, and urban life, is the topic of Van de Mieroop (1999), who attempts to integrate it with Max Weber's ideal type of the 'ancient city'. The chapters on 'city and countryside' and 'household and family' in Postgate (1994) survey the principal institutions of Mesopotamian communities. Van der Toorn (1996) is the classic study on family religion, while the installation of a new high priestess for the storm-god at Emar provides a particularly good example of an entire community's participation in a religious festival (Fleming 1992).

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CHAPTER 6

THE PERSON IN MESOPOTAMIAN THOUGHT

BENJAMIN R. FOSTER

SINCE the decipherment of cuneiform and the development of scientific archaeology, aspects of Mesopotamian civilizations have been situated in modern Western thought as preludes, origins, or the oldest examples of certain human behaviours, institutions, and beliefs. Other important aspects of modern Western culture, in contrast, are deemed lacking in ancient Mesopotamia. These include a notion of person (understood as a legal, social, and moral being), of self (understood as a person's awareness of unique identity), and of the individual (understood as a self-sufficient organism). 'The ancients, like the modern savages, saw man always as part of society, and society as imbedded in nature and dependent upon cosmic forces' (Frankfort and Frankfort 1949: 12). There were, after all, no Mesopotamian biography or autobiography, no reflections or confessions. The sense of self or person was a Greek, Roman, Judeo-Christian, or Renaissance development.

The Frankforts' formulation explicitly linked Mesopotamia to a mid-20th-century ethnographic approach to personhood, with reference to 'primitive' peoples in Africa or the Americas. But for the notion of self in Europe, a historical approach was preferred, with reference to Classical, European, and, to some extent, Indian textual tradition. This has been the norm in the most influential writing on the development of the sense of person or self (Meyerson, ed., 1973; Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985). 'Ancient Oriental Man', offspring of Romanticism, had the same limitations as primitive man. He was socially, spiritually, intellectually, and morally different from, and even antithetical to, the Classical ideal so long emulated by educated Europeans (Marchand 1996: 3–35; Hanisch 2003: 14–15), and a major reason for this was his lack of a sense of individuality.

The student of Mesopotamian culture seeking to challenge this stereotype may follow the example of historians, philosophers, and anthropologists by excerpting written

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sources of interest to his query, for want of native informants. But, instead of quoting Paul of Tarsus, Augustine, Calvin, Spinoza, or Kant, as do many essays on the idea of person in the West, he must choose among often anonymous compositions in Sumerian and Akkadian, fragmentary, poorly understood and difficult to date, in any case from cultural contexts no less varied, and over a longer span of time than divides Paul from Kant. In doing so, he runs the risk of seeming anecdotal, rather than historical or analytic, because he does not have ready for him the cultural superstructure within which, for example, the French anthropologist Mauss could cite Roman masks and the Council of Trent in one influential essay on 'the notion of person' (Mauss 1985). The erring Assyriologist will at least be in illustrious company.

Mesopotamian definitions of the human being

Mesopotamian written tradition of all periods offers varying assessments of what it meant to be a person. The most complete portraits of the Mesopotamian person can be found in poetry. One Babylonian poet defined a male human being by contrasting him to a wild beast, referring to five standards of behaviour: sexual experience with a woman; grooming and anointing his body; wearing woven garments (rather than natural hair or animal skins); eating prepared food, such as bread (rather than grass); drinking fermented beverages (rather than water); and acting as a social being by defending his group and its resources (*Epic of Gilgameš*, George 2003: 1 175–177). The poet's final lesson was that human beings, unlike animals, must learn to live with the advance knowledge that they will die, though without knowing when or how. Sumerian poets had similar concepts: people once ate only raw food and wore no clothes (*Debate between Ewe and Wheat*, ETCSL 5.3.2; Black et al. 2004: 226). A Sumerian literary motif contrasted urban culture with that of the pastoralist, adding that respect for the dead was characteristic of a civilized human being, but not the nomad: 'Who grubs for fungus at the bottom of hill slopes, who does not understand respect, who eats raw meat, who has no house his entire life, who, when he dies, will not be interred' (Buccellati 1966: 330–331; Kramer 1990: 20–21).

Some Mesopotamian authors, taking a different approach, tried to define humanity in the greater range of being, gods to demons, who, unlike animals, resembled humans in appearance and behaviour. The main differences between demons and people were that people had names and families, unlike most demons, and that people, also unlike demons, were subject to tender emotions and needed to eat and sleep (Geller 1985: 52–55). The main difference between people and gods was that gods were omnipotent and immortal (Bottéro 2001: 58–64). According to one Mesopotamian analysis, the human race had in fact been created to provide for the gods, so humanity was to be understood first of all as playing a servile role in the grand scheme of the universe. Although that teaching was co-opted and elaborated upon in the interests of human royalty, in the

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form of scholastic 'creation stories' in which the duties and place of human subjects were pompously set forth (Mayer 1987; Lambert 2008), the story in its fullest form was subverted to make human beings the heroes: they must do as they are told, or suffer the consequences, but something divine in their make-up urges the best of them to resent and protest against the injustice of unequal labour, production, and consumption (Kraus 1973: 132–133; Foster et al. 2005a (hereafter, '*Muses*'): 229–253; Sitzler 1995).

Human beings, in this analysis, had a sense of justice that distinguished them from animals, demons, and the gods, or at least most of them. Was the human sense of fairness ignorantly projected onto the supernatural? If, as an unhappy dialogue called the Babylonian Theodicy suggests, wild animals and demons lived without justice ('The savage lion that devoured the choicest meat, Did it bring its offerings to appease a goddess's anger?' *Muses*: 916), and if the gods did not reward and punish according to human concepts of justice, was the sense of justice a quintessentially human characteristic?

These Mesopotamian inquiring minds offered no comforting visions of a dominant or elysian place reserved for human beings among the broader throng of living creatures, largely because death was no way out to a better experience than this life. Therefore the human being had to work out his place, if he felt the need to, in the here and now, and with the clock running (Black et al. 2004: 113; Klein 1990a: 58–59):

> The time for a human being comes closer:
> Yes, it dwindles from day to day,
> Yes, it dwindles from month to month,
> Yes, it dwindles from year to year.

Gods and demons were largely exempt from the sentence of death, while animals had no sense of its inevitability, so only human beings had to come to terms with its mystery.

The person in society

Some Babylonian poets preferred to define a male human being, socially and economically, in terms of his authority and place in society: his commanding voice and masterful presence; his role as a manager and man of property, centre of a large family and circle of peers, regarded with favour by his superiors and with respect by his menials (*Muses*: 396–397). Citizenship and civic pride were shown publicly by attendance at local festivals, preference for local deities, even city names, in name-giving, and laudatory literature about cities and their cult places. Sumerian literature offers reflection on what was foreign and alien (Limet 1972), as well as conceits to explain differences in language and culture (*Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, ETCSL 1.8.2.3, following Klein 2000). Akkadian literature, broader in its outlook, commented, even positively, on foreign manners and customs in conquest narratives (Zaccagnini 1973).

In more ordinary circumstances, most people identified themselves by name and the name of their father and perhaps their and his profession (Kraus 1973: 46–57; Gelb 1979:

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29–39). A more extended sense of lineage can be gleaned from certain formal contexts, such as a major sale of land of the late third millennium in which ninety-eight men from sixty-four families in thirty related lineage groups took part (Gelb 1979: 80); in various words for extended family; and, in the first millennium, in the practice of certain elite families of tracing descent from some remote ancestor. Assyrian snobs sometimes referred to the fact that they were from 'old' families of their cities (Tadmor 1983: 451).

Pride in family and personal reputation were more immediate for most people than their civic identity. Unkempt appearance, flagrant violation of social and moral values, erratic behaviour, poverty, and lack of a patronage network were causes for individual shame and reproach. The concept of patronage extended beyond heads of families and local notables to patron deities; it was expressed using kinship terms, or, more picturesquely, 'those around your doorway' (*The Home of the Fish*, ETCSL 5.9.1; Black et al. 2004: 241). Concerns with family propriety were raised in legal proceedings, the motivation for which was not the punishment of the accused or the welfare of the victim so much as the implications of the matter for public decency and family honour (Gurney 1983: 41–45).

Social hierarchies were outlined in Mesopotamian lists of titles, professions, and roles (Böck 1999). Social status (Kraus 1973: 126–187; Joannès 2004: 147–148), though important in legal matters, was seldom referred to in letters, literature, scholarship, or commemorative prose: 'You said to yourself, "I am the son of a gentleman, he the son of a commoner"' (*Muses*: 225). Economic status, especially wealth versus poverty, was, by contrast, frequently referred to (*Muses*: 921):

> Solemnly they speak well of a rich man,
> 'He's the king,' they say, 'he has much wealth.'
> They malign a poor man as a thief,
> they lavish mischief upon him, they conspire to kill him.

Indeed, poverty and weakness were often stigmatized (*Muses*: 920):

> They extol the words of an important man who is accomplished in murder,
> they denigrate the powerless who has committed no crime.

The physical person

In Mesopotamian tradition, there is little to suggest a concept of a separate, coexisting soul, mind, and body; rather, the body was the essential person (Asher-Greve 1997). There were various words for disembodied human spirits—one referred to the spirit of a dead person (gidim/*eṭemmu*), another to a kind of airy presence (*zaqīqu*)—but these appear to have been detached phenomena rarely encountered, rather than inherent aspects of the essential living being as experienced in daily life (Abusch 1998; Bottéro 2001: 64; Stede 2007: 16–33).

From poets we learn that the Babylonian vision of an ideal man encompassed the corporal presence: imposing height and harmony of limbs, a purposeful, vigorous stride and long reach, a gleaming, alert glance, sharp hearing, good appetite, an authoritative

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voice, and clear, well-turned discourse were all admired. The Assyrian and Babylonian's private, dynamic sexuality and self-worth could be gauged from his dignified deportment and pride, which commanded respect, his strong sense of self-preservation and productive genius, plus his magnetic power of attraction, physical and emotional.

The Babylonian ideal woman, poets sang, aroused pleasure, desire, and good humour in a man, but was attentive to the needs of other women; she was bright-eyed and lustrous of skin, proud but vulnerable, intelligent and ambitious, but supportive of the man who chose her to be his equal. She completed him and rendered him accessible by her greater approachability and more intimate access. She was at once wife and daughter, confidante and admirer. She was physically attractive, even seductive; well brought up and educated, with womanly skills, such as healing and nurturing; she was strong and brave and a good household manager (*Muses*: 583–591; Heimpel 1981: 89). Babylonian law echoed the last trait by denying divorce to a woman who had been a spendthrift (Roth 1997: 108). The majority of the poets constructing these images were perhaps men working out their female ideals in artful language, and the law favoured men anyway (Steele 2007). The ideal female physique in Sumerian and Akkadian poetry tends to be vaguer than that of men, giving preference to what men felt when they looked at a woman, especially (if she was dressed) her face and eyes (Bahrani 2001). Brilliant red lips stand out in one description of a girl in a dream (Kinnier Wilson 2000: 540). As to what women responded to in the male physique, scholarship and literature agree on curly locks of hair, preferably flowing loose to the shoulders (Köcher and Oppenheim 1957–8: 63; *Epic of Gilgameš*, George 2003: I 618 l. 2).

Focus on the head and face is well attested in Babylonian literature and scholarship, in which the parts of the body were generally ranged from the top down (Civil 1967), and, more broadly, in descriptions of people in literature, which began with the gods, descended to the inmost self, then moved laterally to kin and associates (*Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, Foster 1983: 128).

In the sober and minutely observant world of Babylonian scholarship, behaviour, attitudes, physical attributes, and personal appearance were evaluated as presages of success or failure, so scholars developed elaborate lists of favourable and unfavourable physical traits and mannerisms. For them, too, height in a man or woman was positive. Thin hair portended failure, while shaggy hair and a dark complexion betokened a villain. Grey hair meant contentment in a life well lived; a big throat meant a liar. A long chin suggested a trouble-maker; a small face meant a long life. A broad nose portended a doomed marriage. Qualities of leadership were thick hair and a handsome, radiant face. Women should have long fingers and broad breasts, the scholars said; small hands in a woman portended a hypochondriac. A man who thought of himself as a hero would come to shame; the know-nothing would live a long time, as would the person who tended to do things right (examples from Böck 2000).

Commemorative inscriptions and images of male rulers often attributed to them prodigious size, wonderful beauty, or muscular strength, such as Eannatum I of Lagaš, who stood more than five cubits tall, Naram-Sin of Akkad, whose superb body was worthy of the goddess Ištar's love (Winter 1996; Hansen 2002), and Assurnasirpal II of Assyria,

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whose massive arm muscles bulge from his palace reliefs to intimidate the viewer. Royal women, although seldom portrayed or referred to in inscriptions, seem to the modern viewer mature, imposing, and strong of character (Reade 1987; Winter 1987; Bahrani 2001). The Assyrian king Aššur-bel-kala went so far as to set up statues of nude women throughout his realm, explaining that their purpose was to stimulate the viewer's thoughts (Grayson 1976: 59). His artists gave the royal fantasy massive proportions, so we may assume that this was a standard of beauty (in general Garelli 1990, though mostly architectural evidence). Sennacherib, for his part, announced in an inscription that his wife was the most beautiful woman in the world (Reade 1987).

Given names were a nexus of tradition and choice and so provide a rich source, situated in private life beyond the pales of poetry and scholarship, for hopeful assessments of a person's appearance, behaviour, and capabilities (Limet 1968; Stamm 1939). Names that singled out physical characteristics of the child chose general appearance, such as 'Good-looking,' 'Handsome' for males, or such properties as bravery and strength. For females, names denoting sexual allure, such as 'Cutie', 'Sexy', were not uncommon, though names denoting sexual attractiveness occur for men as well (Stamm 1939: 248–249). The common element 'radiance' in names may well focus on the face as the first indicator of health and well-being. On the other hand, few obvious candidates for names praising intelligence, keen senses, or insight readily present themselves, as these were qualities deemed acquired rather than present at birth. In a few cases in which we may surmise that people chose their own names, they seem to have been motivated by hope for patronage: '[king]-Naram-Sin-is-my-God', not to mention numerous names invoking king Šulgi (Limet 1968: 398–401).

Most men and women, no doubt, fell short of the ideals as poets, scholars, artists, and parents presented them, and we have little in the way of self-reflection to guide us to a more general Babylonian or Sumerian sense of person and personality: the wish for self-improvement is not commonly encountered in Mesopotamian written tradition.

The inner, feeling person

Praising the goddess Ištar, a poet sings that her glance bestows well-being, defined as vigour and self-esteem, genius, and good instincts (*Muses*: 86; in general, Oppenheim 1977: 198–206). In the language of everyday life, however, other inner qualities or states come to the fore as more important. Of three Akkadian word choices to refer to happiness, one (*hadû*) had its nexus in the gratification of a want or a need met, a mood or disposition, a personal triumph or gain, as well as pleasure at the misfortune of an adversary. It was the standard opposite of sadness. A second (*riʾāšum*) was stronger, more like joy, at escaping a threat, or experiencing a thrill, at seeing something especially moving, or feeling a tingle of anticipation. This was preferred in figurative language, where intensified expression seemed called for: the land was overjoyed at a new reign, the gods were delighted with a king. Yet a third perspective (*elēṣu*) was more physical, an experience that caused the body or spirit to swell and glow with pleasure, such as immoderate

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consumption of alcohol or lovemaking with abandon: 'his mood became relaxed, he was singing joyously, he felt light-hearted and his features glowed' (*Epic of Gilgameš*: Foster 2001: 14; in general Jaques 2006: 268); drinking songs were part of Sumerian literature: 'When I feel grand, when I feel grand, drinking beer in a merry mood, imbibing fruit of the field in a light-hearted state, with a joyful heart and a happy inside…' (Civil 1964: 74). A study of the feelings expressed in Sumerian literature (Jaques 2006: 33–83) reached similar conclusions for Sumerian expressions of happiness.

Grief and regret in private life were associated with illness or loss, such as loss of a loved one, an opportunity, or resources. Formal, written prayer and penitence, on the other hand, were replete with more general matters one should properly feel sorrow for, but such expressions do not occur in letters: acts of commission and omission, thoughtlessness, unfortunate speech (Mayer 1976: 111–118; Baldacci 2008). One finds little expressed regret, in prayers or letters, for such common experiences as acts of personal cruelty or poor business decisions. The notion of apology was conveyed by the statement 'I have done wrong' rather than 'I am sorry', acknowledging therefore the deed itself rather than a consequent emotional response to it.

Outward signs of happiness were a glowing face, of grief weeping and the telltale tracks of unhappiness on the cheeks, in Babylonian thinking as if scalded by hot tears. To meet public expectations, crying could be ritualized by hiring professional keeners for funerals (see Löhnert in this volume); joy could be expressed by shouts, cheers, and laughter. In Sumerian particularly, but also in Akkadian, happiness was bound up with the celebration of holidays. Inwardly, happiness and sorrow were associated with the heart and, more generally, the vital organs lower down (variously 'liver' or 'belly'), as the seat of emotions.

Perhaps the best-attested feelings in public and ritual life were anger and hatred, for which the Akkadian language offered a rich assortment of words with such nuances as fury, rage, annoyance, and vexation. The omnipotent gods found space in their hearts to be angry with entire communities or lands as well as with individuals for their misdeeds. In private life, people got angry for the usual reasons; a magic spell to resolve domestic disputes runs, 'O Ištar, he is angry with me! Make that angry man come back to me, though he is angry, make him come back to me! Though he's in a rage, make him speak to me!' (Scheil 1921: 25, ii 15–19). Anger could be expressed physically by turning the head away, averting the face, or turning the back, outright hostility by pointing at the victim. Anger was thought to 'constrict' or 'fill' the heart or vitals, it 'burned', and was to be calmed or soothed (Foster 2007b: 71–72).

The two faces of anger and hostility were anger where there should be love, as between family members, and natural, martial fury against strangers and enemy lands (Kramer 1958; Jaques 2006: 111–114). The former was seen as an opposite that both Sumerian and Akkadian thinkers explained as an inherent tension or polarity: where there was the greatest happiness, there could be the greatest misery as well (Foster 2007b: 76–78). Hostility to strangers seemed natural but was developed into a religious virtue and programmes for conquest by Assyrian tyrants with the means to carry them out. The best fighters were possessed by a kind of impersonal fury.

Among the amply attested feelings in documents of private life and expression are appeal and gratitude for fulfilment of a wish, the latter an irony to a philologist, as both

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Sumerian and Akkadian lack specific words for 'thanks,' conveying this notion with blessings and expressions of happiness (Sallaberger 1999: 125–126). In Babylonian private letters, returning a favour or expectation was one of the few personal engagements sometimes explained and justified, even parodied, as in this humorous school exercise in letter-writing: 'If I had nothing I wished for, I would never write to you' (*Muses*: 225). The common inducement to gods to do a favour is that other gods will speak well of the benefactor and the human servant will glorify the benefactor's name. Indeed, a study of how appeals were made in 2500 letters of the first half of the second millennium found that reciprocity was one of the most important strategies, along with asking help in time of need and appealing to personal and family esteem (Sallaberger 1999).

Natural affection, as between parents and children and among siblings, was the measure of kindness, consideration, and generosity, and was invoked in both prayer and common correspondence, often in a reproving or persuasive mode: 'Although we were children together, you paid me not two cents worth of attention after you got your big break . . . .' (Stol 1981: no. 15); 'You are my brother, you are my master, I am no unknown nor a stranger, I am your flesh and blood!' (Michel 2001: no. 208). Declarations of love tend to the literary and pious: there is abundant love poetry but no love letter, as the term is understood in modern cultures, though expressions of love can occasionally be found in family correspondence. The motif of love as a malady or weakness is not found in Mesopotamian love literature, though the fantasies and forlorn hopes of unequal love could be bitingly portrayed (*Muses*: 155–159, 167–168).

Contempt was strongly felt. One god, Erra, was prepared to destroy civilization if he was not taken seriously (*Epic of Erra*: *Muses*, 901). Slights or affronts were frequently mentioned or rehearsed in detail in private and business letters. These included not recognizing or honouring the complainant's sense of his own status, inadequate compensation, ignoring communications, or making social judgements (Durand 1997: nos. 404, 408).

Worry and concern, though often mentioned, are seldom explained or clarified in detail. When one spoke of cares and anxieties, it was mostly in connection with health of family and friends, less so with property: 'Don't be worried lest I hear about it and I'll worry too!' (Cagni 1980: no. 103).

The person as story and the well-lived life

Cuneiform literature could reflect on stages or chapters of life, such as birth, youth, maturity, and old age, in one case opining that a life of seventy years was a generous measure, eighty years venerable, and ninety years extreme old age (Klein 1990a). Birth was a perilous voyage to the light (Stol 2000: 65). The elitist character of most writing tended to exclude early childhood as a subject worthy of interest, save in magic spells

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intended to protect babies from harm and to stop their crying. In rare exceptions to this pattern, a Sumerian lullaby entered the literary corpus (Black et al. 2004: 193–195) and the Assyrian goddess Mullissu promises king Assurbanipal that she will be a tender mother: 'I will sit up at night to watch over you; during the day I will give you your milk. First thing in the morning, I will play peek-a-boo with you!' (Parpola 1997: 39). A Sumerian poem speaks hyperbolically of the goddess Inana overseeing happy children in the city Akkad (Black et al. 2004: 119):

> Even the suckling infant of the officer (away on campaign)
> played happily with a rattle while in his nursemaid's arms.

A Sumerian satire jests that the antediluvians, who lived immensely long lives, must have been in diapers for a century, and, as infants, were interminably small, dim-witted, and useless, rather than appealing (Jacobsen 1981: 220–221). Educated people did not, so far as we can see, sentimentalize their childhoods, but tended rather to suppress thought of babyhood and to denigrate the rashness of youth.

Little is known of remembered childhood play, so its role in the formation of character remains unknown. In literature, girls played group rhythmic games; they danced, skipped with a rope, and sang, so these could stand for the carefree play of childhood with same-sex peers (Kilmer 1991). Older girls went about in groups, chattered and confided secrets to each other, and wore pretty clothes for holidays so boys would notice them (Sefati 1998: 187; *Muses*: 418–419). Boys could loiter in the street, whistle at girls, and gawk at spectacles (*Muses*: 199; Foster 1987: 27). The most famous group game for young men is attested in connection with the hero Gilgameš; in the Sumerian version of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, this was a free-for-all played with two objects, perhaps a ball and stick, and could be rough and painful. So disgusted do the citizens of Uruk become with their king's bullying ways that the gods open a hole in the earth and the hated equipment drops into the netherworld (Black et al. 2004: 31–40).

Youthful desire and courtship were the subject of both Sumerian and Akkadian poems, which speak of encounters in the street and inviting the beloved to the home for parental approval, as well as arranged marriage, not to mention 'whispers, assent, sweet shared captivation' (*Muses*: 86; Alster 1993). Wedding festivities and consummation of marriage provided subjects for songs (Sefati 1998; Black et al. 2004: 84–86), whereas Akkadian magic gloats over fervid images of marital pleasure that certain demons had been denied, so they hovered about, waiting to vent their spite on human beings in their tender domestic moments (*Muses*: 988):

> The girl who never lost her virginity like a woman,
> the girl who felt no pleasure in her husband's loins,
> the girl who never took off her clothes in her husband's embrace,
> the girl whose garment pin no good-looking young man released…

From the magician's standpoint, these were good, human experiences that everyone should share at some point in life, though his emphasis on youth suggests that a lifetime

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spent in pursuit of them could be as undignified and miserable as the fate of the envious demon. Both the Sumerian and Babylonian poetic spirit could look back on rites of passage in the education of the senses to enhance them with a warm glow of remembered feeling, chapters of a life well lived in its time, as in this reference to pregnancy (*Muses*: 949):

> The time I carried the fruit within me,
> happy was I, happy my husband!

Married life, without recourse to prostitutes, sexual relations with slave girls, and extramarital affairs, was widely recommended and succinctly summed up in a Sumerian proverb: 'The married man is well taken care of, The unmarried man sleeps in a haystack' (Alster 2005: 88). In a Sumerian saying, one woman lists what she offers, and wonders if there is a man worthy of her (*Muses*: 423):

> My heart is discretion, my inmost self is good counsel,
> my emotions are restrained, my lips speak delightful words!
> Who will be the groom of my choice?

Another woman, however, stresses financial security (*Muses*: 423):

> Who is wealthy? Who is rich?
> For whom shall I reserve my intimacy?

If old age had its benefits, freed of the impetuosity of youth, it had its disadvantages as well, summed up in a Sumerian vision of a happy land where 'The old man does not say, "I'm old".' (Alster 1983: 63). A moving Assyrian poem reflects on a miserable life and thoughts of suicide, but even in the depths of depression the sufferer hesitates to let go (*Muses*: 699):

> Death has tantalized me like a precious stone,
> I constantly go up to the roof to jump off,
> but my life is too precious, it turns me back.

Death obliterated everything that was attractive and enjoyable in people, leaving them recognizable in a ghostly way, but cold and unresponsive. The hereafter was dominated by a ghastly cavalcade of monsters presiding over a dry, dark, cheerless abode where the achievements of this life counted for little (Bottéro 1980; Scurlock 1995; Wilcke 2002; Stede 2007). So dreary was the netherworld that one Babylonian poem imagined even its queen was starved for amusement, sex, and pleasure, till she had a passionate affair with the god of destruction, then settled down to married bliss (*Muses*: 506–524).

Thus the good for the human race was to enjoy this life, and missing out on the good things that life could bring was a deprivation eternal: 'I have not seen the beauty of my life…' (*Muses*: 698). Even a king confides that what should bring him pleasure in his lordly life is his children, his throne, fine meals, and the royal fanfare; he mentions nothing else (*Muses*: 329). The sage barkeeper on the edge of the inhabited world advises the errant hero Gilgameš to eat well, to make his days and evenings happy ones, to bathe regularly, to be a considerate lover, and to enjoy his children (Foster 2001: 75):

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> Look proudly on the little one holding your hand,
> let your mate be blissful, time and again, in your loins.
> This, then, is the work of mankind.

The parent and homemaker could say to himself: 'This is my son, when I have reared him, he will requite my pains…This is my home, I built it for myself, I shall spend my leisure in it, on the day fate claims me, I shall lie down to rest inside' (*Epic of Erra*, *Muses*: 906). Few, perhaps, asked or expected more than these things of life.

As for the blessing of material goods, Sumero-Akkadian wisdom literature was rife with admonitions on their transitory nature (*Muses*: 419):

> The loft of your house, as much as the storehouse, is full of grain,
> but on the day of your death they will count out but nine loaves
> as a grave offering and put them by your head.

In day-to-day correspondence, however, small material possessions, such as items of jewellery and clothing, sometimes loomed large as matters of importance:

> You keep writing me about the stones you saw…As if I would have denied to you that I had them in my possession and would have concealed them, in my repeated responses to your repeated letters, and not given them to you by now! I wish I could find out where they are, see them for myself, and pay out even 10 shekels of silver for them! (Stol 1981: no. 61)

The person as story was developed into a fictional autobiographical genre of Akkadian literature in which a ruler of the past reflected on certain important events in his life and offered admonitions to the future (Longman 1991). Genuine royal autobiographical reflections are found occasionally, usually for self- justification (Tadmor 1983), but none of the thousands of letters from Mesopotamia contains extended autobiographical reflections or anecdotes.

The accomplished and experienced person

Sumerian poets, in the service of the personality cult of their master, king Šulgi of Ur, not to mention his imitator, Išme-Dagan of Isin, dwelt on their patrons' courtly accomplishments as athlete, musician, linguist, scholar, warrior and master of martial arts, and responsible steward of his domains (Klein 1990b, 1995; Black et al. 2004: 304–308). Outside of court life, however, such accomplishments as athletics and music do not seem to have been widely cultivated, so they were not parts of the complete person, in the way that singing, boxing, or swordplay were in more recent societies. If one seeks Šulgi's enviable inventory of graces in the lower ranks of society, no evidence survives for how one acquired training and reputation as an athlete, though there is ample evidence for individual and combative sports, less for team sports. School-day compositions make no

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reference to athletic training and almost none to supervised play. The quintessentially male sport was wrestling. If the god Martu won his bride's favour by winning a wrestling match (Kramer 1990: 18–19), and an Amorite king used a wrestling metaphor to illustrate sizing up an opponent (Durand 1998: no. 517), the Amorite king did not visualize himself or his son in the match. Wrestling may therefore have been a spectator sport performed by marginal entertainers, like sword-swallowing(?), juggling, and vaulting (Blocher 1992; Durand and Guichard 1997: 52–58; cf. Ziegler in this volume). Sumerian literature in particular expresses admiration for the 'strong man' or athlete (survey in Yamauchi 2003).

So too, inventories of private estates do not mention musical instruments nor do private letters refer to individuals learning how to sing or play (Geller 2003; Ziegler 2007). In literary contexts, shepherds play the flute (*Muses*: 504), so this may have been seen as an instrument easily played and preferred by ordinary men.

As for acquisition of language, Assyro-Babylonian culture saw itself as bilingual, with Akkadian and Sumerian two modes of expression for one culture, and the only languages properly speaking translatable (Klein 2000); for other languages, mere dragomans were needed. Thus, in an Akkadian-speaking society, Akkadian was taken for granted. Šulgi does not mention it among his accomplishments, perhaps because it was his maternal tongue. In general, no one studied foreign languages beyond collecting a few words of them as curiosities (Balkan 1954: 2–11) or jesting about their uncouthness (Oppenheim 1960: 143). In an Amorite-speaking society, formal or 'classical' Akkadian had to be learned to participate in the international exchange of the period (Durand 2008: 216–220); a late Assyrian king, likewise, was ruffled when a correspondent proposed to address him in the Aramaic vernacular, as it was contrary to protocol (Dietrich 2007: no. 2). Thus multi-lingualism in the second and first millennia was limited in scope, consisting of mastering the classical style of whatever language was used at the time and place for formal communication, plus Sumerian, but nothing else.

Therefore it seems that the accomplished or well-developed person, outside of court life, was less one who had acquired skills and graces of practised performance than someone who spoke well and effectively, who was highly intelligent and understanding (in Assyro-Babylonian terms, a function of hearing), and who was far-sighted or visionary. Intelligence and vision were built on active cultivation of the related senses and broad, mature, varied experience in their use, thus meeting a definition of the individual as a development, outcome, or a story, rather than as a being with a static bundle of attributes bestowed at birth. The latter was more typical of heroes and gods, and so was exceptional. Superior perception was, in fact, singled out for praise, even among the gods, whereas praise for learned mental or physical skills was rarer. Sight and hearing were also stressed in representational art, in which eyes and ears were often large in proportion to the head or face (Winter 1989: 579–582).

Of the two remaining senses, the ability to take an impression and to remember and sensitivity of feeling were viewed as tactile in origin, whereas motivation, superior understanding, and being well informed were perhaps associated with taste and appetite, as with the biblical knowledge of good and evil. According to one poet, the impetus behind the heroic human rebellious spirit was reason or motivation (*Muses*: 236),

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by etymology at least derived from the sense of taste. Unlike the other senses, taste, and its correlates, hunger and thirst, were more physical drives than windows on the world. Taste, hunger, and thirst, in contrast to sight, hearing, and touch, were rarely used metaphorically, such as 'hunger for news' or 'thirst for knowledge' (Veenhof 1987: 62–64), so one may wonder if the interpretation offered here relies too much on etymology and symmetry. The physical act of eating was used metaphorically in the senses of 'partake of' or 'enjoy' material goods; when it referred to internal assimilation, the sense was more commonly something negative that would come back to haunt the person later (Charpin 2008: 136–137).

The acquisition of written learning, making for the complete educated person, is well known through the self-congratulation of the erudite. School days were the subject of various light-hearted sketches, dating to the early second millennium, which offer the usual fare of excessive work, harsh discipline, insufficient vacation time, and adolescent pedantry (George 2005). Apprenticeship, by contrast, is seldom referred to (see Cohen and Kedar in this volume), though one unemployed scribe compares himself to an apprentice diviner expelled from his master's house (Hallo 1968: 86) and thus the butt of contempt, and the term 'beginner' or 'amateur' (*agašgu*) was not complimentary. Praise or remembrance of a specific master or teacher were not so much the norm as tracing intellectual lineage to a sage of the remote past. Kings might add to their educational opportunities such courtly skills as horsemanship and admittance to the deliberations of the wise and powerful (Villard 1997; Zamazalová in this volume). Education brought with it a sense of entitlement and the expectation of an interesting and comfortable life: 'The scribal art is enjoyable, one can never have enough of its charms…Work hard at the scribal art and it will surely enrich you' (*Muses*: 1023).

Ideal deportment can be gleaned from works of wisdom and from comments in letters about how people should act. Surveys of early second-millennium Assyrian business and family letters suggest that, for men, good deportment included polite reserve, equanimity of temper, courteous masking of social differences, generous adherence to the codes of familial respect and patronage expectations, responsiveness, honesty, and avoidance of temptation. Women were more open about their private feelings (Larsen 2001; Michel 2008: 134–136). One interesting expression used by Assyrian upper-class women in times of high stress, 'I can't cope' (*ul ele"i*), is mirrored in literature by an attribute of the goddess Ištar, 'The Capable One' (*telītum*) built from the same root, meaning that she can cope with anything.

Specific forms of deportment, such as politeness, can be gleaned from studies of the salutations used in letters (Salonen 1967), the rituals of inter-palace exchange of gifts (Zaccagnini 1973: 95–147), and in passing remarks, such as on table manners, as in these comments from Mari: 'When they are seated opposite me during the meal, they should bow according to the number of dishes I offer them' (Durand 1997: no. 4).

Notions of the skilled and expert person were expressed in a range of words in both Sumerian (ummia, galam) and Akkadian (*ummiānu, etpēšu*). One can approach the self-awareness of professional competence and reputation through expressions of anxiety in prayers for adequate technical skill in the learned arts, especially divination: 'Let

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favourable comments precede me, Let favourable gestures follow me' (*Muses*: 642). There was also the usual backbiting among scholars (Lambert 1960: 259): 'Why did he make such a hash of (the ritual)? He is incompetent!' (Parpola 1993: 214; *Muses*: 429) and plenty of schoolboy invective on the matters of ignorance and bungling (Vanstiphout 1997).

Crafts and arts, such as weaving, brewing, or metalworking, were considered, at least contractually, to have a minimum skill set, beyond which experience and resourcefulness made masters. Rulers sometimes boasted of their skills in technology as the basis for new wonders they had created (Soden 1954: 111–118), and encyclopaedists perhaps imagined that they had captured the essentials of arts and crafts when they could manipulate their argot and draft sketchy directions for how they were carried out (Muhly 1972: 180–181; Robson 2001: 50–54). In private life, the only skills boasted of in surviving letters were weaving and household management; some students and scholars could not resist bragging about their learning, the more useless the more impressive (Civil 1985).

Cleverness turned on the ability to innovate, to create something new and surprising, as the god Marduk did when he invented a human being (*Enūma Eliš*, Tablet VI, *Muses*: 489), or the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II when he created a new kind of statue (Grayson 1976: 137), but the element of surprise could be unpleasant as well, when cleverness could lead to a ruse or deceit (*Muses*: 852–856). Mesopotamian tradition knew the sense of satisfaction at the masterwork well executed (*ṣubbû*) and it knew the stroke of genius or breakthrough in the solution of a problem (Foster 2005b: 251).

Stupidity was understood to refer to inability to reason for oneself or to foresee the consequences of one's actions, as well as slowness in thought and acquisition of information. To judge from curses attached to monuments to prevent their desecration, the mentally deficient were not deemed responsible for their actions, because they did not know any better, so if manipulated by another, the latter was the culprit (surveys in Fensham 1963; Steymans 1995). A proverb said that the powerful feared fools (*Muses*: 435), presumably because fools might not act out of predictable self-interest. For the greatest sage of all, Uta-napištim, survivor of the deluge, the fool was the person who did not take advantage of the opportunities and satisfactions available to him but squandered them in self-indulgent display, such as acts of asceticism and self-denial (*Epic of Gilgameš*: George 2003: 1, 694–695; *Muses*: 424).

Is death the journey's end?

Wielders of the stylus comforted themselves, even insisted, that the written word was the doorway to survival after death, to which they held the key (Radner 2005). Literacy was greater than strength, as the strong would weaken and die but the written word lingered on. Thus the *Epic of Gilgameš*, which in its earlier version told of a strong man who hoped his heroism could bring him immortality, in its later version told how he gained knowledge of first and last things (life before the great flood and

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after death) and preserved it in writing. His knowledge and his reputation were his immortality.

Being progenitor of a large and successful family over succeeding generations was a kind of perpetuity, but most typically expressed by kings who hoped to add the dynastic principle to the otherwise god-given paraphernalia of kingship (Radner 2005: 74–90). Indeed, a Babylonian legend told how the gods had given the crown and sceptre, but not the dynastic principle, perhaps expecting that kingship would pass from one worthy individual to another, but that already the first king, Etana, tried desperately to found a dynasty (*Muses*: 533–554).

There is less evidence for this motivation in private life. A seemingly brusque and mature marriage proposal refers only to the man's expectation that his wife will be near him and serve him meals, not that she will bear him children (Michel 2001: no. 397). Childlessness is, in fact, best known from legal documents focused on inheritance and maintenance of the elderly, rather than in literature (Stol and Vleeming 1998).

Manifestations of the self

The sense of self is amply documented in Mesopotamian sources, despite modern writers who sometimes claim that ancient Mesopotamians could not have possessed it (Snell 2005). Self-confidence was a quality admired in daily life, though rhetorically denounced in Assyrian royal inscriptions that insist one should not trust in oneself but only in the strength of the gods. A Babylonian king, Samsu-iluna, on the other hand, boasted that he built a city wall with his own strength and no other assistance, while Syrian and Urartian kings claimed that they won their kingdoms single-handed (Oppenheim 1960: 140). A Sumerian conqueror called himself 'Lord Self-made' (Enmetena, Alster 1974), whereas a particularly self-reliant Akkadian personal name was Anaku-ilumma 'I-am-(my-own)-guardian-god' (Stamm 1939: 130).

Thinking for oneself or deliberating was an attribute implicitly praised in name-giving (Mitlik: 'Think first!', apparently good advice to a child), as well as many other contexts. The soliloquy, or talking to oneself, appears occasionally in Akkadian literature, usually in connection with doubt or regret: 'Now I understand how grievous the crimes of my land are become, how numerous its sins!' (Edzard 1990; *Muses*: 307).

Self-reference in literature can be approached through 'signature', where authors identify themselves by name in the text, such as Kabti-ilani-Marduk, author of the *Epic of Erra*, and through analysis of literary use of the first person for greater emotional immediacy (Foster 1983). In the *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, the author's elaborate self-effacement has impact only because it is the opposite of what one would expect from a commanding, important personality, now brought low by divine caprice at the height of his powers.

Portraiture in Mesopotamia art is fraught with theoretical problems (Bahrani 2001: 96–120; 2003: 143–145), but in both ordinary speech and in literature the possibility of a

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statue or drawing of a person sufficiently recognizable by others to call that person to mind was taken for granted, as in an extravagant thank-you note, where the writer says 'I will engrave pictures of you on my arm!' (Sallaberger 1999: 125–126), and in a heroic poem, where the king promises to set up a statue of the fallen warrior in front of his own (*Muses*: 109), not to mention Gilgameš's splendid statue of his dead friend, Enkidu.

Jealousy and competition, amply documented in cuneiform sources, imply that a robust sense of self-worth was a norm, rather than fatalism or a sense of inadequacy (Kramer 1960; Oppenheim 1967: 84–85).

Some modern scholars look for isolated signs of individuality or originality in formalistic cultural contexts, holding them up as exceptional (Oppenheim 1959), but Sumerian and Akkadian literature offer many examples of sometimes powerful creativity and originality. In Sumerian, one can cite the autobiographical reflections on creativity attributed to the high priestess Enheduana (Hallo and Van Dijk 1968; Zgoll 1997; differently Black et al. 2004: 315–316). In Akkadian, one may cite the *Epic of Erra*, a work original in both conception and style, and which, like Enheduana's poetry, can be attributed to a specific author in time and place (Foster 2007a: 106–109). Most Akkadian and Sumerian literary works, however, if read closely, show individual features (Abusch 1983; Zgoll 2003), so the stress on genius privileges, perhaps unfairly, the highly original that breaks with or sets a new tradition, rather than creativity within a given set of patterns and expectations (Hecker 1977). Personality in Mesopotamian figurative language, documents, and works of art has been little studied (Klengel 1977), though the imprint of the royal personality on commemorative inscriptions is the subject of a pioneering monograph (Soden 1954: 2–5).

On a broader intellectual plane, reflections on the specifics or individuality of Mesopotamian culture as a whole were not framed as such (Machinist 1986), but were implicit in many sources of many different kinds and periods. The Mesopotamian person, as opposed to all other people in the world, was defined by the Sumerian and Akkadian languages and by the major cities of his land that the gods had chosen as their dwellings on earth. The values of urban civilization were best upheld in Mesopotamia, as there cities and their culture were uniquely linked to the unseen worlds in heaven and below the earth and its cultural attributes had radiated throughout the world. Cities were the salient, soaring features of the level, productive Mesopotamian landscape, whereas other cultures had to make do with a more differentiated, barbaric terrain (Hallo 1970; Mieroop 1997).

For most people, no doubt, such grand schemes held little interest, not to mention the elaborate cosmologies and measurements of the world and the sky that the intellectually adventurous worked out (Horowitz 1998). Mesopotamian self-consciousness was based on the serene assumption that foreigners, given the necessity and the opportunity, would adapt themselves to Mesopotamian culture. The Persian Empire was the first instance of a ruling people in Mesopotamia who did not, but considered Mesopotamia part of a larger whole that belonged to them. In this extraordinary new world, the older Mesopotamian sense of self-identity, which had served the preceding Neo-Babylonian Empire well, may have begun to look more and more antiquated.

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Further reading

A.L. Oppenheim, 'Mesopotamian "psychology", in Oppenheim (1977: 198–206) deals with Mesopotamian attitudes towards the divine and the sense of destiny. Nemet-Nejat (1998) gives information on private life. Kraus (1973) remains the most comprehensive effort to draw a picture of one period of Mesopotamian history from many different aspects, including some of the topics discussed here.

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CHAPTER 7

THE SCRIBE OF THE FLOOD STORY AND HIS CIRCLE

FRANS VAN KOPPEN

This chapter looks at the social context of Mesopotamian poetry, not as it relates to the origin of certain compositions but with an eye to the question of where and how one famous example may have been received. Mesopotamian poetry was no reading matter but something that had to be recited, presumably accompanied by musical instruments, in order for an audience to consume it, but ancient performances have vanished without a trace. All we have are tablets that capture the words, giving evidence for a secondary, educational absorption in the material. The challenge is to find our way back, as far as can be done, to a prior, performative context, in the hope of distinguishing the people attending, or perhaps even understanding something of what they thought while listening to the same words that we decipher from the clay.

The poem that interests us is the Flood Story, also known as *Atram-hasis* after its main protagonist, a popular work of literature in the city of Sippar at the end of the Old Babylonian period (*c.* 1800–1600 BC). Our window into the world beyond the manuscripts is the student who wrote his copy of the story: one Ipiq-Aya, the 'apprentice scribe'. We find a great many of his future colleagues in legal documents of that time: specialists who were paid to observe the agreement being made and to produce its appropriate written record are mentioned at the end of the list of witnesses that is part of every contract tablet. The word 'scribe' is here appended to their names, a proud reminder of their education as much as their part in the mechanisms of Babylonian legal and commercial life. And Ipiq-Aya was destined to join their ranks.

Reading and writing were, however, not the domain only of the educated minority. Many more men (and women) had enough knowledge to read or even write simple texts (see Veldhuis and Lion in this volume). The widespread use of writing in Old Babylonian society becomes very clear when we look at the archaeological record for this age: the percentage of urban households that owned clay tablets exceeded those where none

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could be found, an observation that suggests that cuneiform literacy peaked in the time from the Ur III period to the Old Babylonian (Wilcke 2000). The vast majority of Old Babylonian tablets come, therefore, from private urban dwellings, and by 'archives' we mean the total inventory of tablets found in such locations. Excavations have revealed that literary manuscripts occur here side by side with administrative and legal texts (see Tinney in this volume). Most of them were the product of scribal education that involved copying of samples of literature by the students, others were written down for some unspecified intellectual pursuit, but few if any were ever kept for reference purposes. The literary tablets on which we rely to study the intellectual culture therefore either represent discarded raw material (the famous floor fill from the Nippur and Ur schools), or had not yet been cleared away when the inventory of their houses turned into archaeological material—an event that more often than not can be attributed to some violent catastrophe. Working with the latter type of evidence opens up perspectives on the social conditions of the consumption and transmission of the text that are mostly lacking for the former, because associated legal and administrative records can cast light on the people to whom they belonged, their profession and social standing, or even specific cultural traditions that might resonate in the literary work. The case of Ipiq-Aya is particularly promising in this respect, because he wrote his copy of *Atram-hasis* less than a decade before a major catastrophe turned his city into a smouldering ruin, and we have therefore reason to be optimistic that a rich context for these tablets is somewhere at hand.

The prospects for an examination of the setting of Ipiq-Aya and his work are, however, somewhat clouded by the fact that much of the textual record from his city, Sippar, has come down to us in a state of disarray. Sippar is in fact a cluster of two ancient sites, Abu Habbah and Tell ed-Der. Less than 10 km apart, in antiquity they were separated by a branch of the Euphrates and in Ipiq-Aya's days were known as Sippar-Yahrurum and Sippar-Amnanum, respectively. Since the 1940s a number of scientific excavations have been conducted at both sites, with some still in progress, that have explored domestic dwellings and revealed their inventories of tablets, but the vast majority of the available material was excavated before that date without any form of documentation. When in the 1880s demand for Mesopotamian antiquities was stimulating commercial prospecting of numerous sites of abandoned cities of the Iraqi flood-plain, Sippar was the first and for a long time the most rewarding source of cuneiform tablets and other artefacts of the Old Babylonian period (Kalla 1999). While the general provenance of the finds is usually not in doubt, excavations were conducted in many different areas and finds sold in mixed lots to numerous public and private buyers. Groups of tablets from the same location were thus broken up and mixed with tablets from other archives, and what once belonged together is often no longer recognized as such.

Some degree of order can be restored with the help of textual evidence, supplemented by indications based on the composition of the acquisition lots. Two guiding principles for this reconstructive work is that the different locations that were excavated at any given time were usually few in number, and that excavations were conducted more or less exhaustively, so that one may expect each house that was explored

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by 19th-century diggers to have contributed a representative sample of its tablet inventory to the Sippar corpus. Proceeding along these lines will result in the identification of assemblages consisting of a core of tablets that can be unequivocally attributed to a single circle of related users (on the basis of personal names or other distinctive features), with a periphery of records of less certain attribution (for example, using their acquisition context or date range), and which display a typical chronological profile where numbers of datable records swell as one nears the catastrophic cut-off point. Archival reconstruction cannot bring all disparate members back together and tablets without distinctive criteria may go unnoticed, including tablets of literary content that seldom contain dates or personal names. Ipiq-Aya's habit of both signing and dating his work therefore offers a welcome opportunity for situating some literary tablets in their archival context, and for that matter not the merest of writings but his superb three-tablet edition of one of the masterpieces of Akkadian literature, the story of *Atram-hasis*.

The story of *Atram-hasis*

That the Old Babylonian period is renowned as a time of great cultural vitality is in no small measure due to the sudden appearance of a dynamic and compelling new literary genre—Akkadian narrative poetry on an ambitious scale, with the so-called epics of *Gilgameš* and *Atram-hasis* as the best-known examples. Literature written in Akkadian goes back almost as far as the oldest surviving Sumerian compositions but for most of the time lay outside of the literary mainstream (Groneberg 2001). The burst of originality that gave rise to this exciting new genre was ignited when poets versed in the traditional forms and themes of Sumerian narrative art started to compose in their own vernacular. The literary idioms of Akkadian poetry and popular speech were closer in the Old Babylonian period than at any other time, and a newfound freedom of expression, while guided by the classical paradigms, seems to lie at the root of one of the most creative phases in the history of Mesopotamian literature (Sallaberger 2008: 89).

The subtitle of the standard modern edition of *Atram-hasis*, 'the Babylonian Story of the Flood', focuses on the most dramatic episode in this vast story. In fact it encompasses the whole mythological history of mankind, starting in a world still without people, where a conflict among the gods about the division of labour is resolved by the creation of the human race. It follows humankind's progress under the leadership of a man called Atram-hasis ('Exceedingly-Wise') through a series of catastrophes inflicted upon them by Enlil, the divine ruler of the earth who shares man's domain but cannot bear their clamour, and culminates in his attempt to wipe out mankind once and for all by means of a deluge. Each time Enlil's plans are thwarted by Enki, the cunning god of the subterranean sweetwater ocean, who cares for his creation and in particular his servant Atram-hasis and helps humanity survive each disaster. He tells Atram-hasis to build

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an ark so that he and his crew can survive the flood. This calamity is disastrous for mankind but also hard on the gods, who in its aftermath agree on a variety of measures in order to permanently rein in humankind's procreative powers, so that god and man will be able to exist in mutual dependence with no more need for periodic culling. The rules of the world as the Babylonians knew them have now been set.

This broad and organic tale compactly addresses and explains a host of fundamental issues: why the human race came to be, their link to the gods and the meaning and value of their lives, the mystery of birth and why people have to die, and the origin and purpose of various other facts of life. In accomplishing these aims the author weaves a flowing narrative out of a series of independent mythological motifs, in which issues arising in each are resolved in the others: humankind was created to free the gods from the hard work of providing for themselves, and labour in the service of the gods is their purpose in life. Man is made from clay but mixed with the flesh and blood of a slain god, and as such no mere work drone but a creature in possession of intelligence and ambition, and imbued with the impulse to reproduce that harks back to the creation of the first men, when the gods set in motion what is re-enacted at every human birth. The bustle and growth of the human race disrupted the old order of things that prevailed when only the gods inhabited the earth, symbolized by Enlil's inability to sleep because of their noise and his growing irritation with every failed attempt to reverse the swelling turmoil. Only when Enlil had achieved his wish and eradicated all but a few did the gods discover their need of people, for without them they suffer want. A structural solution was necessary that would allow god and man to cohabit in peace, one that in effect limited the human growth potential so that Enlil would not again be kept awake: to offset births all humans would henceforth ultimately have to die of natural causes, and birth numbers would be kept low by infertility, child mortality, and chastity for certain types of priestesses.

The Babylonians considered that man's individual and collective welfare was wholly dependent on the continued satisfaction of sometimes temperamental gods, but in the story of *Atram-hasis* they found a powerful assertion of their own importance in the final order of things: we may be at the mercy of the gods, but the gods cannot do without us either. The poet alludes to this key message right from the start, in the famous first line that also served to name the composition: *inūma ilū awīlum*, 'When the gods were man (they bore the toil, carried the load)': god and man are no opposites but two sides of a single whole that operates the universe. The gods only became 'gods' when they had created man as their complement, and man shares in their essence because he was made with divine flesh and blood, an element that lives on as a spirit (*eṭemmu*) after he dies, and like the gods was unaffected by death from natural old age until this was imposed upon him after the flood. Humankind did not, however, come about through calculated design but was invented to solve a specific problem among the gods, and at first was not well adapted to the needs of its master Enlil. A long crisis of ever-mounting tension took its course until the trauma of the flood brought home that there can be no turning back and that people are here to stay. It was the flood that made the gods more sensible masters and put people in their present condition, reason for the poet to conclude his work,

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1243 lines on from the opening, with the words: 'I have sung of the flood to all the people—take notice!'

The story of *Atram-hasis* bears the hallmarks of the work of a single author: there is a controlling intelligence in the build-up of the story, a power of synthesis, and a sense of structure and symmetry, with a role for word- and sound-play throughout the composition. Drawing on existing mythological material, some of which is known from contemporary Sumerian compositions, it is more likely the work of an anonymous creative mastermind than the elaboration of a traditional story. The poet has flair for characterization and his work is nowadays celebrated as a masterpiece for its humour and wit as much as for its breadth of vision. The final lines reveal that *Atram-hasis* was to be sung, most likely to the accompaniment of instrumental music, and its rhythmic language will have made it highly suitable for public recitation, a context where this dramatic story of an escalating crisis must have fascinated and delighted its audience with the frustrations and manifestations of power.

All surviving manuscripts show the marks of individual scribes taking a free hand in rewriting the text, but they are nevertheless sufficiently close to justify the belief in a single, specific point of origin of the poem. A comparison with the most popular episode of the Gilgameš saga is revealing: the journey of Gilgameš and Enkidu to the Cedar Forest and their fight with Huwawa is attested by a number of Old Babylonian texts that represent widely different renderings of the story (George 2003). This suggests that in this case the written texts reflect different oral versions of the tale, while simultaneously more formal editions of the *Epic of Gilgameš* were in circulation as well. *Atram-hasis* is different in that the Old Babylonian manuscripts all represent what is basically the same text, provided we accept the liberty of the scribes to alter it as they saw fit. Different adaptations of *Atram-hasis* circulating orally may or may not have existed, but it is clear that popular storytelling had little influence on the written tradition of the text. Thus while we have to recognize the existence of a wide range of interacting oral and written traditions—in Sumerian and Akkadian—about Gilgameš in the early second millennium BC, the poem of *Atram-hasis* seems to have taken a different path, starting with a conjectural first performance and from there disseminating through society by means of recitals and in writing.

Dated manuscripts of *Atram-hasis* belong to the reign of Ammi-ṣaduqa, the penultimate king of the First Dynasty of Babylon (r. 1646–1626 BC), but it is not clear how much older the composition is. Wilcke (1999) has argued that the hot-blooded ways of governing displayed by Enlil in the story reflect contemporary popular opinion about the brutal and destructive rule of king Samsu-iluna (r. 1749–1712 BC). But this is difficult to harmonize with a new manuscript allegedly from the kingdom of Larsa, which must therefore predate the events that Wilcke had in mind (George 2009: no. 2), or an inscription of Ipiq-Ištar, a contemporary of Hammurabi (*c.* 1760 BC), that alludes to the flood in a way that seems informed by the story of *Atram-hasis* (Koppen 2005). An original context for the performance of *Atram-hasis* is not known either, but we are presumably not too far off when we situate this at a royal court or other elite setting, where much of the early Mesopotamian literature began as entertainment for the privileged.

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However important the date and origin of *Atram-hasis* may be, equally interesting and certainly more productive is the question of the use and reception of the work to which we shall now turn. One feature of *Atram-hasis* that is immediately striking is just how well it is represented in the Old Babylonian textual corpus. With the exception of specialist literature (divination, etc.), literary manuscripts in Akkadian are always relatively rare in this period and narrative poetry is particularly scarce, no doubt because works of this kind had no place in the traditional scribal curriculum (see Tinney in this volume). There are therefore very few Akkadian laudatory and narrative works available in duplicates, which makes it all the more remarkable that we have so many manuscripts of *Atram-hasis*. From Sippar, where almost all Old Babylonian witnesses for *Atram-hasis* were found, we have in addition to the three-tablet edition of the whole poem by the hand of Ipiq-Aya no fewer than three manuscripts that correspond to his first tablet (MSS E, F + BM 22714b and G; for the link between MS F and BM 22714b see Wilcke 1999: 68 n. 9) and one or two that parallel his second (MSS D and HE 529; the latter might be a fragment of Ipiq-Aya's MS B). There are no duplicates for the third tablet of Ipiq-Aya's edition but this is in line with the familiar tendency of the beginnings of compositions to be better documented than their ends. No other work of Akkadian belles-lettres comes even close to this in distribution, which speaks eloquently for the popularity of the story of *Atram-hasis* during the last generations of the Old Babylonian period, the time when most literary tablets found at Sippar were written. Yet if we ask who these people were that had an interest in the story and why they wrote it down, we soon reach a deadlock because all manuscripts have been separated from any associated documents in the process of discovery and trade. The only name associated with the poem appears in three colophons to which we now shall turn.

Ipiq-Aya, the apprentice scribe

Fragments of a set of three tablets that originally contained the whole story of *Atram-hasis* in 1245 lines are nowadays located in museum collections in London, New York, and Geneva. Each tablet ends with a colophon that gives its sequence number and the name of the composition, the number of lines it contains, the name and title of the scribe, and the date when the tablet was written. This is the work of Ipiq-Aya, the 'apprentice scribe', the only Old Babylonian copyist of *Atram-hasis* whose name we know. The Old Babylonian version of *Atram-hasis* is occasionally named after him but there is no reason to give his work particular significance, other than the fact that it has survived fairly intact (even though no more than half of the text is fully preserved): some Sippar manuscripts of *Atram-hasis* that differ from Ipiq-Aya's tablets in content or arrangement of poetic verses over lines of text show that the composition was circulating in more or less divergent editions in his days. The name Ipiq-Aya has been the subject of some debate, and *Ellet*, *Ku*, *Kasap*, and *Nur* have all been proposed for its ambiguous first sign (Walker 1982; Lambert 1983). The correct reading is *Ipiq*, as suggested by Wilcke (1999: 68–69),

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and we find the same name in less ambiguous orthography for another member of his family.

Ipiq-Aya's name and title appear in more literary tablets: in the colophon of a manuscript of a Sumerian city lament and, most likely (but the text is damaged), under the first tablet of the lexical series Diri. Other tablets without colophons can be tentatively assigned to him on the basis of script and acquisition circumstances, such as an Akkadian story about king Naram-Sin (Finkelstein 1957: 83–84), and perhaps a fragmentary Akkadian wisdom dialogue which shares an unusual spelling (*pí-a-šu*) with *Atram-hasis* manuscripts bearing Ipiq-Aya's signature. Ipiq-Aya's tablets, with the evidence from their colophons and the date when they were acquired or first described, are given in Table 7.1.

There are limitations to a reconstructed corpus like this: the inclusion of the last two items is not certain (Westenholz 1997: 269) and, given the degree of modern-day dispersal of the collection, it is inevitable that more tablets without colophon are yet to be included. But what there is conforms to the expected repertoire of an Old Babylonian student scribe. In Nippur advanced lexical lists like Diri were studied towards the end of the first phase of education (see Veldhuis in this volume), followed by a second phase that was devoted to copying literary texts in Sumerian, and the elementary curriculum in Sippar seems to have followed this model (Tanret 2002). The dates in his colophons indicate that Ipiq-Aya also studied lexical lists before tackling narrative texts, suggesting that these tablets too are the product of a scribal education, but one with a different selection of poetic compositions than in the much better documented scribal curricula at Nippur and Ur. There are two further indications that confirm the idea that Ipiq-Aya was writing out *Atram-hasis* as part of his scribal training: his title of 'apprentice scribe' and what else is known about his career.

The 'apprentice scribe' (DUB.SAR TUR) is a character known from Sumerian compositions which purport to describe Old Babylonian school life, and evidence from late Old Babylonian Sippar allows us to confirm that people so defined found themselves there at the beginning of their scribal careers. A good example is Qišti-Ea who copied out the Sumerian tale of *The Three Ox-Drivers from Adab* (ETCSL 5.6.5) at the beginning of Ammi-ṣaduqa's 8th regnal year and signed his work as DUB.SAR TUR (Alster 1991–93: 27, where the proposed reading of the title must be corrected). More than three years later legal texts start to appear that are written by Qišti-Ea acting in the notarial capacity of professional scribe on behalf of his fellow citizens (Harris 1975: 106–109, 300; Stol 1976: 153). At some point he changed his title from 'scribe' (DUB.SAR) to DUMU É.DUB.BA.A, 'son of the Tablet House,' another common designation for scribes that most often, but not always, was introduced at some later point in their career (the significance of these alternative titles is yet to be adequately explained, see Tanret 2004: 44–48). This example ties in with what is known about Ipiq-Aya, but not every apprentice scribe from Sippar is attested as a professional scribe in later documents. Neither Ina-Eulmaš-zerum, the apprentice scribe who copied the Laws of Hammurabi (Finkelstein 1967), nor Ibni-Šamaš, who is responsible for another copy of Hammurabi's laws (Donbaz and Sauren 1991) as well as a list of Babylonian year names (Horsnell 1999: I 263), appears among the

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Table 7.1 Ipiq-Aya's known literary tablets

Composition	Name in colophon	Date in colophon[1]	Collection	Date of acquisition or first description
Diri I (Civil 2004: 53)	SI[G-^{d}A.A (…)]	Aṣ 10/v/15	British Museum	12 October 1901
Atram-hasis II (MS B)	SIG-^{d}A.A DUB.SAR TUR	Aṣ 11/xi/28	Morgan Library Collection	Scheil 1898
Atram-hasis I (MS A)	SIG-^{d}A.A DUB.SAR TUR	Aṣ 12/i/21	British Museum	26 April 1889
Atram-hasis III (MS C1 + C2)	SIG-^{d}A.A DUB.SAR TUR	Aṣ 12?/ii/[..]	British Museum	26 April 1889 and 9 May 1891
			Musée d'Art et d'Histoire	Boissier 1931
The Ur Lament (ETCSL 2.2.2; Anne Löhnert pers. comm.)	SIG-^{d}A.A / DU[B.SAR TUR]	Aṣ [..]/xii/[..]	British Museum	14 October 1889
Naram-Sin and the Enemy Hordes (Westenholz 1997: text 20A)	no colophon preserved	no colophon preserved	Morgan Library Collection	Scheil 1898
Dialogue between Two Friends (Lambert and Millard 1965: no. 44)	no colophon preserved	no colophon preserved	British Museum	12 October 1901

1 Aṣ = Ammi-ṣaduqa's regnal year, followed by ancient month number and day of month. For instance Aṣ 10/v/15 = Ammi-ṣaduqa year 10, month v, day 15, which roughly corresponds to early August 1637 BC.

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scribes of the Sippar corpus, but it is difficult to ascertain whether this is due to incomplete data or perhaps a different career path. Iddatum, finally, the apprentice scribe who copied an Akkadian Naram-Sin legend in the 14th year of Ammi-ṣaduqa (Walker 1981) could be the DUMU É.D[UB.BA.A] who wrote a receipt some seven years later (BM 81135), but we lack further evidence that could corroborate this link.

Now, in his capacity of scribe Ipiq-Aya is also known from just a single document, which he wrote at a later date, and circumstantial evidence supports an identification with the 'apprentice scribe' of the same name. This tablet (Figure 7.1), dating to the 17th year of Ammi-ṣaduqa, is a house rental contract for a property belonging to a high-ranking court official, the major-domo Riš-Marduk. He is known from other sources to be the son of the treasurer (*šandabakkum*) Marduk-mušallim. The renter is the judge Ipqu-Annunitum, a well-known resident of Sippar-Amnanum. Riš-Marduk is not personally involved in the lease but has his interests represented by Akiya (a short form of the name Ikun-pi-Sin), the son of Ibni-Sin and the head of a very well-known family in the same town of Sippar-Amnanum commonly referred to as the 'Akšaya family' (Kalla 2002: 135–136). Clearly Riš-Marduk's main residence was in the capital city of Babylon but he employed Ikun-pi-Sin as his local agent to look after his property in Sippar. The contract, which confirms that Ipqu-Annunitum will pay the rent and keep the property in good condition, was part of Ikun-pi-Sin's archive. From another tablet in this archive we know that Ikun-pi-Sin leased out arable land belonging Riš-Marduk early in Ammi-ṣaduqa's 18th year (Dekiere 1995: no. 556, collated), and a whole series of letters has survived in which Riš-Marduk urges Ikun-pi-Sin to pay up the rental income for his house and field that Ikun-pi-Sin should have collected on his behalf.

On what grounds are we to accept the identification of the scribe of this record with Ipiq-Aya, the copyist of literary tablets? In the first place its date—the contract was written some seven years after the first dated study material of the student scribe—and their common place of origin. More significant however is the particular social setting of the transaction: Ipiq-Aya drafted a contract between the head of the Akšaya family and the judge Ipqu-Annunitum, and we shall see in what follows that Ipqu-Annunitum was a relative of our student scribe, whose ancestors often wrote tablets for earlier generations of the Akšaya family. All of this, together with the fact that the name Ipiq-Aya is not at all common, is enough to accept that we have here the same individual, who had progressed from 'apprentice scribe' in Ammi-ṣaduqa's 12th year to 'son of the Tablet House' by the 17th year of that king. One aspect seems unexpected, however, if his career did indeed take this course: many scribes of Sippar-Amnanum in the days of Ammi-ṣaduqa are abundantly documented (see Tanret 2004 for the activities of just one of them), and if Ipiq-Aya had joined their ranks in the second decade of that reign we may surely expect him to be mentioned more often than he actually is. This, then, suggests that his main employment lay outside of that city, and we can speculate that he may have been engaged by Riš-Marduk in Babylon, a charge that will have required the occasional mission on his master's behalf back to his home town during which contracts like the one we are discussing could have been written. Of course we need more evidence before this scenario can be lifted from the realm of fiction, but at least we can

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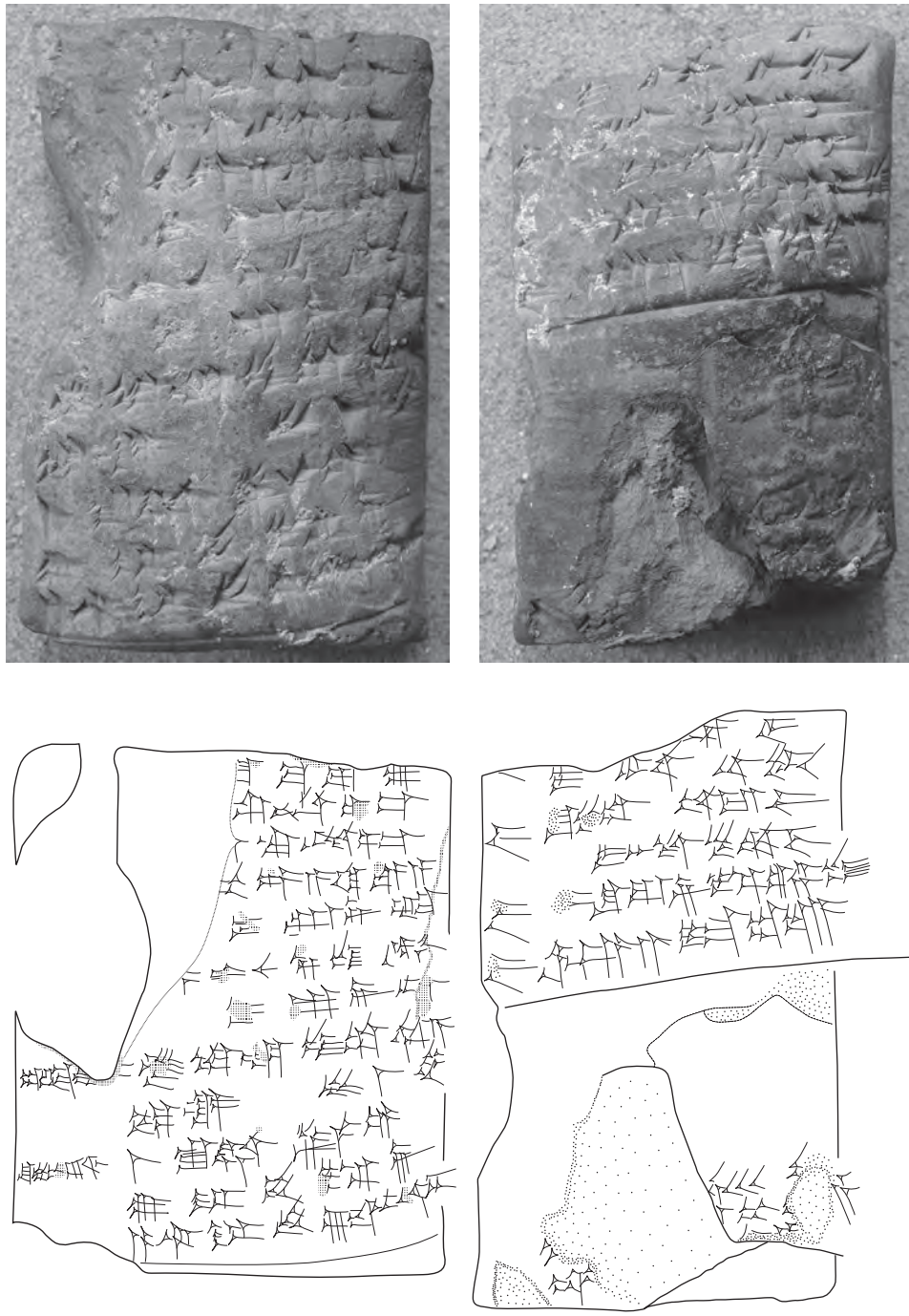

FIGURE 7.1 House rental contract: the only text written by Ipiq-Aya as a notary scribe (British Museum, BM 17501). It reads: '[A house] as far as it extends, [a house belonging to] Riš-Marduk, the major-domo—Ipqu-Annunitum, the judge, the son of Ibni-Šamaš, has rented it from Riš-Marduk, the major-domo, through the agency of Akiya, the son of Ibni-Sin. As rent for one year he will pay one shekel of silver. He will plaster the roof and keep up the foundations. [Before Sin-mu]šallim, the son of Šamaš-naṣir; before Šumum-libši, the son of Marduk-mušallim; before Ilšu-ibni, the son of Sizzatum; before Ipiq-Aya, the "son of the Tablet House". [*Month broken*], day 30 of the 17th year of Ammi-ṣaduqa.' (Transliteration in Dekiere 1994: no. 325). (Photos and drawing by F. van Koppen)

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be confident that Ipiq-Aya will have made an attractive secretary for any palace official, given the scribal competence that is noticeable from his literary work, as well as his influential family network—to which we will now turn.

The house and the tablets

For more information about Ipiq-Aya's background one should consult any practical documents that are associated with his literary tablets. The evidence in Table 7.1 shows that these tablets came to light during a period of little over a decade (although the fragment at the Muśee d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva was not mentioned in the literature until much later), with the majority unearthed in or before 1889, and perhaps a second discovery in 1898 or before. Each time the finds were split up by the process of trade. Given their coherence as a group, it is virtually certain that the tablets were found in one location, which was first explored in the late 1880s, the heyday of commercial excavations at Sippar, and perhaps later revisited, but there is nothing about the tablets to indicate whether this took place at Abu Habbah or Tell ed-Der (other than the reports cited in Lambert and Millard 1969: 33 n. 1, the veracity of which no longer can be confirmed). As literary tablets are usually found in private houses, one can expect that other, non-literary tablets should have been unearthed here as well, but no such records have so far been identified. The obstacle is that the name Ipiq-Aya is quite rare in this period outside of the colophons discussed above, while no other personal names are anywhere associated with our scribe. Other clues than the incidence of specific individuals are therefore required to bring the disparate members back together.

A first piece of evidence is provided by the acquisition history of the manuscripts. As it happens, most of them are part of museum collections that also contain ample numbers of tablets from one of the more substantial archives from Sippar-Amnanum, one belonging to two brothers, the judges Iddin-Ea and Ipqu-Annunitum, sons of Ibni-Šamaš. Just like all document assemblages from that city, this archive was closed in the middle of Ammi-ṣaduqa's 18th year and its surviving material bears all the hallmarks of an incomplete family archive. Most of its tablets are dated to the last years before the destruction, and all are items of little permanent value (loans, ration accounts, letters, etc.) which would be difficult to imagine in any find context other than their family home. No property deeds or other record types with lasting value are among them, which suggests that Ipqu-Annunitum, the last owner of the archive (Iddin-Ea had died some years before) had been able to remove the most valuable tablets from the house before the conflagration. Almost 100 items are now known that contain names of members of this family and their staff, and there is moreover a sizeable periphery of records (particularly administrative texts pertaining to field work and canal maintenance) that are suspected to be part of the archive but cannot yet be firmly linked with the rest. In addition, five tablets that originally belonged to a certain Sin-naṣir and his brother Nanna-mansum, the sons of Ipiq-Annunitum and distant relatives of the judges, were

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almost certainly incorporated into this archive as well. At any rate, their limited number and chronological distribution discourages the idea that they represent finds from their own house.

The bulk of this archive was traded to the British Museum in London and the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia in the years 1888–91, but the British Museum continued to receive pertinent material until at least 1899. More tablets of Ipqu-Annunitum's archive found their way to other buyers, including the Morgan Library Collection in New York (which also owned two literary tablets of Ipiq-Aya), from where some were distributed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Harvard Semitic Museum. No information has been published about the circumstances in which A. Boissier bought the *Atram-hasis* tablet which he later donated to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva (Sollberger 1951). But it is conceivable that tablets from the judges' archive were still (or again) on the market in the early 20th century because as late as 1921 the Louvre acquired the Ihler-Pognon collection that includes an ample number of such tablets (Arnaud 1989: 5). And it is certainly significant that Boissier also owned at least one tablet from Ipqu-Annunitum's family archive (Szlechter 1958: pl. 40).

The distribution of archival and literary tablets over the same collections is important but by itself not enough to confirm their common source. Fortunately the two details that we know about the scribe of *Atram-hasis*—his name and the fact that he was training to become a scribe—can also be marshalled in support of the hypothesis. In Mesopotamia boys were often named after their ancestors, in particularly their grandfathers (Kalla 2002: 142–145; Radner 2005: 179). Great-grandfathers' names were also commonly used in Old Babylonian times, and in priestly circles we can even find instances where the name of a grandfather's grandfather is invoked (Kalla 2002: 154, 161). It is therefore conceivable that Ipiq-Aya was named after one of his ancestors, and a scribe with the same name is known to have belonged to Ipqu-Annunitum's family about a century before. As we shall see below, this older Ipiq-Aya was the grandfather of Sin-naṣir, the relative of Ipqu-Annunitum the judge whose records ended up in his archive. Sin-naṣir, as well as his father and uncle, were also scribes, and this scribal lineage in close contact with the judge helps to explain how educational material might have ended up in his archive (see Figure 7.2).

Finally an administrative tablet, BM 79010, from Ipqu-Annunitum's archive confirms the link between it and Ipiq-Aya's literary tablets beyond any reasonable doubt. No father's name appears wherever Ipiq-Aya is mentioned as 'apprentice scribe' or 'son of the Tablet House', but BM 79010 shows him to be a son of Sin-naṣir. The text is dated to the last (intercalary) month of Ammi-ṣaduqa's 17th regnal year and its heading describes it as a 'list of silver (and) sesame oil which Nabium-mušallim son of…has given to people who had made requests to him during year 17 of Ammi-ṣaduqa'. The first entry of the account deals with 'Ipiq-Aya son of Sin-naṣir' (ll. 6–7: SIG-^{d}A.A DUMU^{d}SUEN-*na*-*ṣi*-*ir*), who in the course of that year made three withdrawals worth in total $1\frac{1}{4}$ shekels of silver and 4 quarts of wheat (instead of sesame oil), in exchange for which he had given three sealed receipts. The summary in line 19 shows that this was paid out of the field

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rent which he was due. We thus see Nabium-mušallim acting as a banker, providing upon request advances from income to account holders who were most likely not permanent residents of Sippar; one suspects that he also managed farming on their behalf. The name Ipiq-Aya was quite unusual in the days of king Ammi-ṣaduqa (as can be expected when the name of a long-dead relative is reintroduced), so we can be confident that this record refers to none other than our 'apprentice scribe'. Further, the fact that the tablet is part of Ipqu-Annunitum's archive makes it virtually certain that his father Sin-naṣir was Ipqu-Annunitum's distant cousin, the scribe and grandson of the older Ipiq-Aya. With the copyist of *Atram-hasis* now securely linked to this family, we can confirm what the pattern of museum acquisitions had already suggested: the tablets of *Atram-hasis* and other works written by Ipiq-Aya must have been found in the house of Ipqu-Annunitum, the judge and son of Ibni-Šamas.

We know that this house was located in Sippar-Amnanum. It is possible to determine its approximate location because a tablet belonging to his brother, the judge Iddin-Ea, came to light during the Iraqi Directorate-General of Antiquities' 1941 excavation season in Area 5 at Tell ed-Der (Edzard 1970: no. 45, see p. 27; the wrong inventory number is given in Baqir and Mustafa 1945: 42), in the western half of the site. Very few tablets were recovered in this area but ample signs of earlier excavations were visible nearby (Baqir and Mustafa 1945: 38), suggesting that the 19th-century commercial digs encountered Ipqu-Annunitum's house in the immediate vicinity of Area 5.

Ipqu-Annunitum's household was no modest affair. Ration lists show that more than twenty women—consisting of family and domestic staff, most of them with children—were provided for during the last decade of the archive; the same sources also mention a few male domestic servants. Ipqu-Annunitum and his elder brother Iddin-Ea both held the title of 'judge' (DI.KU$_5$), a designation which by late Old Babylonian times was applied to important members of the urban upper-class, with practical connotations and benefits that are still quite obscure. One source of their wealth and influence was commerce: the brothers had an important share in the wool trade that was directed by high officials of the palace in Babylon. Their father had plied the same trade, as had their uncle Sin-išmeanni who is once called a 'merchant' (DAM.GÀR), a term rarely used as a professional title in this period. Their grandfather Awiliya was also a 'merchant' (BM 78397: 8) and involved in the wool trade with Aleppo in Syria, according to an old tablet (dating to the end of Samsu-iluna's reign, *c.* 1720 BC) still kept in Ipqu-Annunitum's archive (Szlechter 1958: pl. 40). The oldest recognized tablet from the archive—perhaps kept for sentimental reasons?—dates to the beginning of that same reign and documents their great-grandfather Ibni-Ea in a commercial partnership with the sun-god Šamaš (Veenhof 2004: 556–557). Interestingly enough Ibni-Ea was not only active in commerce (for his dealings with arable real estate see Van Lerberghe and Voet 1991a: 5), but also earned a living as a scribe (Finkelstein 1968: no. 9, and BM 82093, both from Samsu-iluna year 6), obviously because he was the son of the professional scribe Ipiq-Ea. It is at this point that the lineage of Iddin-Ea and Ipqu-Annunitum intersects with that of their relative Sin-naṣir, Ipiq-Aya's father and a man with a keen interest in his family's past.

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Ipiq-Aya's father, Sin-naṣir, and his ancestors

We would not know much about Sin-naṣir, son of Ipiq-Annunitum and father of Ipiq-Aya, had not a handful of his tablets survived within the walls of the house of Ipqu-Annunitum, the judge and son of Ibni-Šamaš. The two men were only distantly related by blood but must have interacted regularly, considering how often Sin-naṣir, or his younger brother Nanna-mansum, attended the same public events as Ipqu-Annunitum or his elder brother Iddin-Ea (as indicated by witness lists). They were also in the habit of acting as witness for each other's legal transactions, while Sin-naṣir wrote several tablets for the judges, as he had done before for their father, Ibni-Šamaš.

These contacts provide a means of understanding how a handful of Sin-naṣir's documents might have ended up in the archive of Ipqu-Annunitum. Why or when this happened is unclear, but Sin-naṣir's death, some time after Ammi-ṣaduqa's 13th year, may well have been the occasion for this transfer. Some of the tablets handed over deal with slaves belonging to Sin-naṣir and his brother Nanna-mansum (CBS 1538, reign of Ammi-ditana). Others are concerned with fields that were owned by Sin-naṣir and his siblings, including his sister, the Šamaš devotee Geme-Šerda (Pinches 1899: pl. 3, that Bu. 88–5–12, 55), or which were in shared ownership with their cousins (Ranke 1906: no. 94). Also included was a tablet of an entirely different nature, containing an invocation to the moon-god Sin, spoken on behalf of Sin-naṣir, seeking the release of his family spirits from the netherworld so that they could enjoy a meal in his presence (Wilcke 1983: 49–54):

> '[S]in, you are the god of heaven and earth. [In the mo]rning I am pouring water to you [for the f]amily of Sin-naṣir, the son of Ipiq-Annunitum. Release the family of Sin-naṣir, the son of Ipiq-Annunitum, that they may eat his bread and drink his water: (*enumeration of family members follows*). Release the family of Sin-naṣir, the son of Ipiq-Annunitum, that they may eat his bread and drink his water!' (*followed by date*). (Toorn 1996: 53)

This refers to the important cultic practice of *kispum*, the sharing of a meal by the living and the dead, that typically took place during the period at the end of each month when the moon is invisible due to its conjunction with the sun, which explains why the moon-god was thought to be instrumental in effecting their release. The text enumerates deceased members of Sin-naṣir's family over three generations, starting with his great-grandfather and ending with his parents. The list traces family history in the customary way via the male line, while including names of women who married in, as well as those of unmarried daughters with a religious vocation. Clearly the basic function of the text is that of aide-memoire, recording the names that need to be invoked during the ceremony in order to ensure that the generosity reaches and pacifies all interested spirits. More examples of such lists survive, both royal and private (Radner 2005: 86–90), but the formal character of this text—including the prayer framework as well as a full date formula with the 33rd year name of Ammi-ṣaduqa's predecessor Ammi-ditana (1651 BC)—is striking.

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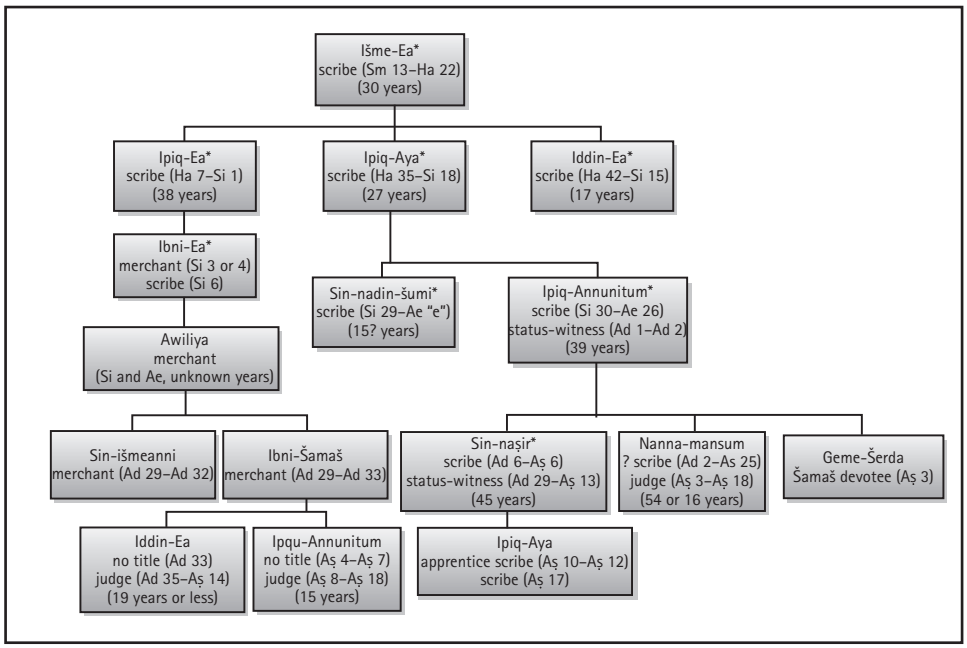

FIGURE 7.2 Ipiq-Aya's family tree (simplified): asterisks (*) mark individuals known from the *kispum* prayer protocol. *Abbreviations*: Sm = reign of Sin-muballiṭ (1812–1793 BC); Si = reign of Samsu-iluna (1749–1712 BC C); Ad = reign of Ammi-ditana (1683–1647 BC); Ha = reign of Hammurabi (1792–1750 BC); Ae = reign of Abi-ešuh (1711–1684 BC); Aṣ = reign of Ammi-ṣaduqa (1646–1626 bc). (Drawing by F. van Koppen)

The text gives us Sin-naṣir's genealogy but it is clear that it does not include all dead male relatives (the collateral line of the judges Iddin-Ea and Ipqu-Annunitum is ignored after Ibni-Ea) and Sin-naṣir's living relatives are not mentioned either, for obvious reasons. In the family tree (Figure 7.2) those family members who appear in the prayer protocol are marked with an asterisk (*) but the names of individuals who are not discussed any further in this paper are generally omitted (for a complete chart of people mentioned in the prayer see Wilcke 1983: 50; Kalla 2002: 156). We have seen that Sin-naṣir was the progeny of a lineage of scribes, but as the prayer does not contain information about professions, the scribes must be identified with the help of contemporary documents, in particular legal texts which they wrote in their professional capacity. In such texts scribes are normally not identified with a patronymic but the inclusion of this information in seal legends and elsewhere confirms the identity of some of them with Sin-naṣir's ancestors. No such evidence is available for Ipiq-Aya's brothers Iddin-Ea and Ipiq-Ea, but since scribes with their names are abundantly documented in their generation, it is almost certain that in this case the three brothers were all in the scribal profession.

The legal texts allow us to determine the time span of these scribes' activities, revealing that some had quite long careers: the three brothers worked as scribes for at least

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thirty-eight, twenty-seven, and seventeen years respectively, while Sin-naṣir and his father Ipiq-Annunitum remained active, respectively, for forty-five and thirty-nine years or more, even if they no longer wrote contracts at a more advanced age. That their role in legal transactions changed later in life is quite evident if we look at their place in the witness lists: early in their careers Ipiq-Annunitum and Sin-naṣir appear exclusively as scribes at the bottom of the list, but later on they are mentioned in more prominent positions, where they are no longer identified by their occupation but by their father's name, while somebody else can be mentioned as the scribe at the end of the list. This promotion obviously means that their presence at the transaction was no longer solicited for their scribal skills, but because their status had made them particularly desirable witnesses for those who sought to strengthen a contract by their endorsement. Earlier scribes of their lineage never appear as status-witnesses, which suggests that the family had risen to prominence in their community.

The most visible manifestation of their social progress is Sin-naṣir's brother Nanna-mansum. It is possible, but not certain, that he too began his career as a scribe, because tablets written by a scribe with this name (DUB.SAR, see Pientka 1998: 203, no. 90; also DUMU É.DUB.BA.A in Dekiere 1995: no. 496, and BM 81459) are dated to the first 25 years of Ammi-ditana's reign. The identification is not certain, however, because this scribe's patronym is not known, and most of the tablets he wrote belong to a distinct group of Sippar-Yahrurum residents. Some time late in Ammi-ditana's reign Nanna-mansum, the son of Ipiq-Annunitum, was awarded the title of 'judge', just like his distant cousins Iddin-Ea and Ipqu-Annunitum (Pientka 1998: 202, no. 84). A telling indication of his high status during Ammi-ṣaduqa's reign is his place in witness lists, which in Sippar texts faithfully reflect accepted social rankings. Nanna-mansum the judge immediately follows the head of the city administration but always appears ahead of the judge Ipqu-Annunitum, his distant cousin, who in turn takes precedence over Sin-naṣir once the last starts to appear as status-witness. Nanna-mansum is attested until the very end of urban life in Sippar-Amnanum and seems to have continued to entertain relations with Ipqu-Annunitum until that date, provided a document for the hire of a ploughman by the judge Nanna-mansum, which is dated to the very month when Sippar-Amnanum was destroyed (BM 79978), actually comes from this house. This is quite likely if Ipqu-Annunitum was the actual employer of the ploughman whose services had been secured through the offices of his influential relative.

A family of Enki worshippers

The lineage of Iddin-Ea and Ipqu-Annunitum was linked by more than a distant common ancestor named Išme-Ea to that of Sin-naṣir and Nanna-mansum: all of them felt a particular affection for the god Enki, also known by his Semitic name Ea. Enki/Ea was the god of the underground sweetwater reservoir (Sumerian Abzu) and of springs and rivers, and—by association with water—provider of purification, healing, and incantations. Despite being one of the main figures of the Mesopotamian pantheon, his cult is

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not particularly well documented in Old Babylonian Sippar, even though it seems to have been of considerable antiquity. A street in Sippar-Yahrurum was called after Ea (Arnaud 1989: no. 116, l. 5) and he shared a temple with his spouse Damkina in Sippar-Amnanum. We learn this from a damage-assessment report drafted for the king by representatives of the city administration, including the *sanga*-priest of Annunitum (the main deity of that city), after its cultic equipment had been vandalized at some time during Samsu-iluna's reign (Chiera 1922: no. 194). This document reveals that Ea's son Asalluhi, and Usmu, one of his two double-faced viziers, were also present in this temple (ll. II 12–13). A reference to a *sanga*-priest of Ea in a text from the reign of king Sabium (BM 80136, l. 17) shows that his cult was already established in Sippar at that time (r. 1844–1831 BC). Indeed it quite possibly long predates that period, if we take into consideration iconographic motifs on seals cut in Sippar before the establishment of Babylonian rule (e.g. Blocher 1992: nos. 40, 48). Enki, depicted with flowing streams of water, and associated figures like the *lahmu*—a naked hero with curls, with or without water streams—are thought to have been more popular in the iconography of Sippar than elsewhere (Al-Gailani Werr 1988: 38–39). More evidence for devotion to Enki/Ea can be found in seal inscriptions and personal names. Comprehensive statistics for both categories of evidence are yet to be compiled, but even a cursory glance at the Sippar data is sufficient to show that it was always a minority who explicitly professed devotion to Enki and his circle.

To this minority belonged the descendants of Išme-Ea, as is evocatively recorded by their cylinder seals. The cylinder seal was an important and highly intimate accessory in cuneiform culture. These small, intricately carved cylinders of precious or semi-precious stone display scenes involving natural and supernatural beings and situations, and many contain legends in cuneiform script, all of which were engraved mirror-wise so that a recognizable outline appears when rolled over soft surfaces. Worn on the body, cylinder seals served a range of functions: personal adornment, symbol of status and authority, talisman, and instrument for marking ownership or acknowledging responsibility when impressed on clay. With its highly individualized imagery and inscription, the cylinder seal's significance went far beyond the utilitarian functions of identifying and validating: it was thought to carry in a very real sense the individuality of its owner, and having been fashioned out of hard-wearing materials was seen to represent his being most enduringly (Cassin 1960; Radner 2005: 22–23). The cylinder seal was therefore closely associated with the concept of progeny (Radner 2005: 78–79) and, if not joining its owner in the grave, devolved to his eldest son and heir as part of a set of social, religious, and legal responsibilities (Koppen 2002).

The cylinder seal was the tiny stage on which individuals could celebrate their devotion to favourite deities, by commissioning specific iconographic motifs or including divine names in the seal design (Wiggermann 2003). While the religious iconography of Old Babylonian seals is a dynamic area of investigation in its own right, ambiguities of interpretation have long made seal inscriptions the preferred data set for the study of personal piety. Legends of Old Babylonian cylinder seals typically cover three or four lines and define the seal owner by his or her name and parentage, and finally as the

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'servant' of a god, an association which is replaced by a statement of allegiance to the ruling king in officials' seals. Some professions—but far from all—were considered suitable for inclusion in the inscription, where they would appear in the second line. A minority of seal legends deviate from this model, with Sumerian (rarely Akkadian) prayers to a specific deity, with or without mention of the seal owner's name, growing in popularity in the course of the Old Babylonian period. The classic seal legend illustrates well how the relationship of the individual to the deity was conceived as that between master and servant, and the fact that family members invoke the same deity (Charpin 1990) shows that this piety did not stem from personal preference but was a sensibility shared by all members of a family and perhaps beyond. The Babylonians called the divine leader and protector of their group the 'god of the father', which is why we may describe them as the family god. However, the worship of these often well-established members of the pantheon was not restricted to any particular kinship group, while conversely the association with a particular deity did not stop the Babylonians from appealing to other gods. The practical manifestations of a particular reverence for the family god are therefore still quite obscure (Oppenheim 1977: 198).

Returning to the seals of Išme-Ea's descendants, as none of the stone cylinders themselves survive we have to rely on seal impressions on tablets where they are mentioned as witness or party. When cylinders were rolled out over a tablet, the framed box containing the inscription was preferred over any other part of the design and hardly anything of what else their seals depicted is therefore shown. All in all eleven seals belonging to eight members of the family are known, and composite drawings of some of them appear in Figure 7.3. Six of them contain a statement of devotion to Enki (twice by the name of Ea). This agrees with the fact that Ea, the Semitic name of Enki, is a frequent divine element in the personal names of Sin-naṣir's family (second most popular after the moon-god Sin), much more frequent than in Sippar naming practices as a whole (Kalla 2002: 138). Seal inscriptions and naming habits are thus in harmony in revealing the importance of Enki as the patron deity of the family.

The scribes of the older generations of the family (Ipiq-Aya, Ipiq-Annunitum, and Sin-nadin-šumi, Figure 7.3 a–d) always include an extra line on their seals proclaiming their status of scribe, a statement that is shared with numerous other seals of scribal graduates. Sin-nadin-šumi used no fewer than four different seals over the course of his life. First he inherited the seal of his father Ipiq-Aya and used it for himself until he had one made bearing his own name in the same type of legend, followed by a second with the exact same legend but slightly bigger than the first (Figure 7.3 c), and finally commissioned a seal where the legend differs in some details from his earlier ones (Figure 7.3 d). Instead of Enki, his last seal names his patron deity by the name Ea, and where his first two seals depict a frontal head of a *lahmu*, a protective and beneficent being from the entourage of Enki, between the signs DUB and SAR that make up the word 'scribe' in the second line, this detail was not reproduced in his last seal. Sin-nadin-šumi had his final seal made early in the reign of Abi-ešuh (r. 1711–1684 BC), and the change of divine name falls in line with the fact that the god of the Abzu is always called Ea, but never Enki, in post-Samsu-iluna seal legends. The date of the last seal also explains the disappearance

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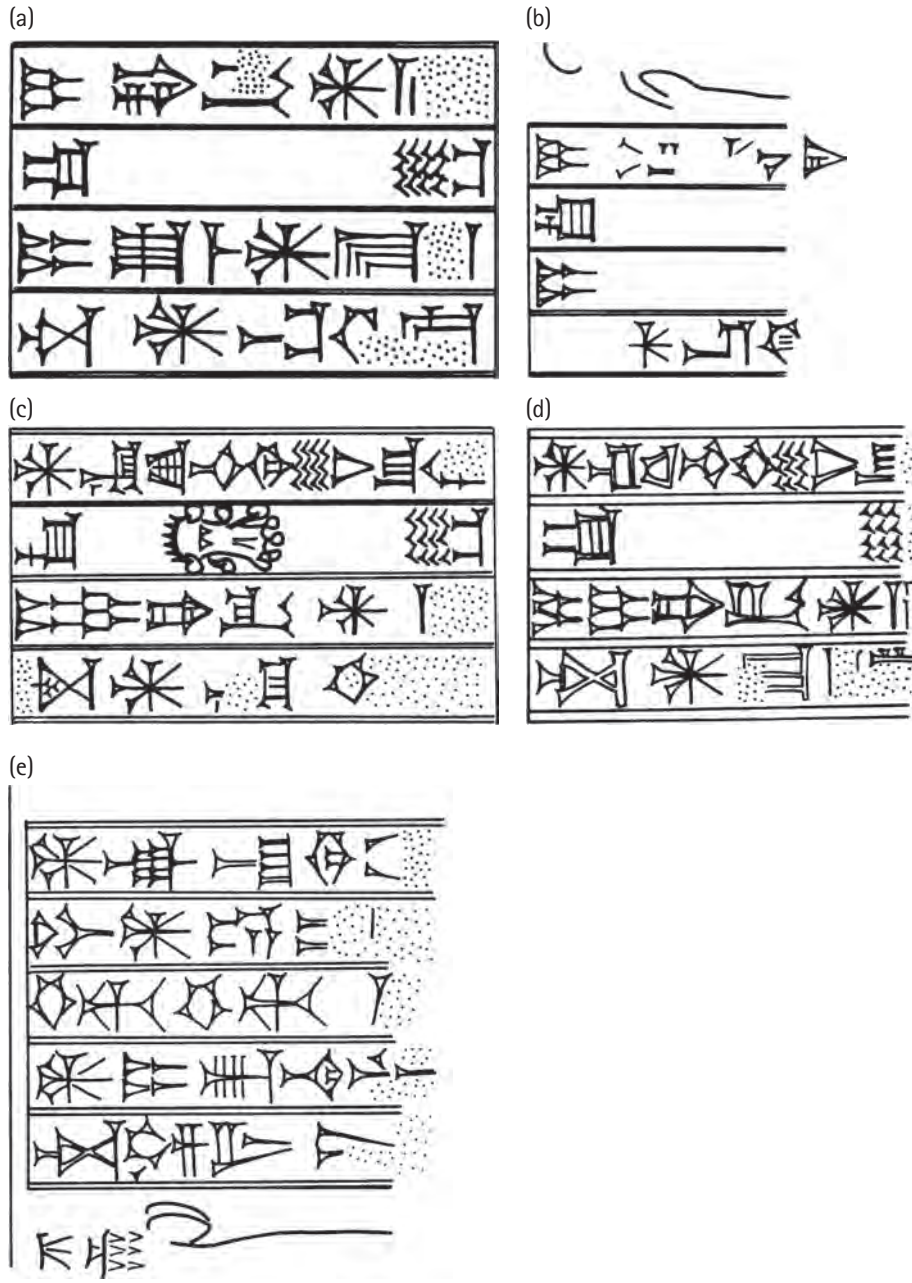

FIGURE 7.3 The seals of Ipiq-Aya, his sons, and father: (a) Seal of 'Ipiq-A[ya], scribe, son of Išme-Ea, servant of Enki' (composite drawing after BM 78776, 80261, 17432A and 17439A, and 82352, where the seal was used by his son Sin-nadin-šumi). (b) Seal of 'Ipiq-Annuni[tum], scri[be], son of [Ipiq-Aya], [servant] of Enki' (drawing after BM 22636). (c) An early seal of 'Sin-nadin-šumi, scribe, son of Ipiq-A[ya], servant of Enki' with the image of a *lahmu* in the second line (composite drawing after BM 81645 and 81656; the exact same design and inscription were used also for a smaller seal, which was impressed on BM 78951A). (d) A later seal of 'Sin-nadin-šumi, scribe, son of Ipiq-Aya, servant of Ea' (composite drawing after BM 96956 and 96980). (e) Sin-naṣir's seal with a Sumerian prayer to Nabium (composite drawing after BM 16932, 79044, 79495, 79920 and 96985; see also Klengel and Klengel-Brandt 2002: pl. 10 seal g). (Drawings by F. van Koppen)

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of the *lahmu*, for adding small figures within the framed lines of the legend had been much in vogue under Samsu-iluna (for references see Van Lerberghe and Voet 1991b: 146 and n. 2) but would seem to have fallen out of fashion soon after.

Ibni-Šamaš, son of Awiliya, used a classical three-line seal legend describing him as a 'servant of Ea' (drawing in Ranke 1906: pl. 56), conforming to a contemporary preference for the Akkadian name of the god. His sons Iddin-Ea (drawings in Klengel and Klengel-Brandt 2002: pl. 9 seal d; Colbow 2002: no. 238.1) and Ipqu-Annunitum (drawings in Van Lerberghe 1986: pl. 45, pl. 79 S.5; Van Lerberghe and Voet 1994: 165 no. 6; Colbow 2002: no. 334.1 = 296.7), as well as their relative Nanna-mansum (drawings in Van Lerberghe and Voet 1994: 165 no. 4; Klengel and Klengel-Brandt 2002: pl. 9 seal c; Colbow 2002: no. 296.5 = 354.2), in accordance with their status as 'judges', use seals with three-line legends that express their devotion to the ruling king in the last line. Both Iddin-Ea and Nanna-mansum continued to use seals that mention king Ammi-ditana during the next reign, presumably because they had been appointed under that king, whereas Ipqu-Annunitum had a seal mentioning the succeeding king Ammi-ṣaduqa, indicating that he was the junior of his peers.

Sin-naṣir's choice of seal design was more unusual. Despite being a scribe like his grandfather and father, he departed from their chosen model and had a seal inscribed with a five-line prayer in difficult Sumerian, one that did not mention his name but expressed his devotion to Nabium, the scribes' god and patron of writing (Figure 7.3 e). Many scribes in the latter part of the Old Babylonian period professed reverence for Nabium on their seals (Charpin 1990: 74–75; Toorn 1996: 81–82), and in this case at least we are able to recognize that Sin-naṣir's devotion to the scribal god followed contemporary trends but did not spring from any traditional attachment of his lineage to this god. Some time between the 8th and 13th year of Ammi-ṣaduqa Sin-naṣir upgraded to another seal, again with a nameless Sumerian prayer of six lines but this time expressing his devotion to Isimu, the other vizier of Enki (drawings in Van Lerberghe 1986: pl. 46 S.2, pl. 79 S.7; Van Lerberghe and Voet 1991b: pl. 78 no. 7; edited in Voet and Van Lerberghe 1993: 52–53). This change of seal fits with what we know about his life story: Sin-naṣir wrote his last tablet for clients in Ammi-ṣaduqa's 6th regnal year and thereafter continued to act as status-witness until his death. Even though we know little about his livelihood in these years, it seems quite likely that this new chapter in his life was also the occasion for a new seal, one that once again invoked his family's favourite circle of deities.

Conclusions: *Atram-hasis* in context

In the above we have seen how *Atram-hasis* and the other literary texts signed by, or attributed to, Ipiq-Aya were written by a boy or young man who was taught to be a scribe. Once his education was completed, he most likely moved away for a career in government, as we suspected from his absence among the scribes of Sippar and saw confirmed

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by his regular 'cash withdrawals' from Nabium-mušallim in the year when business had brought him temporarily back to Sippar-Amnanum. The tablets which he had written during his education had meanwhile found a new home with the judge Ipqu-Annunitum, an old friend and distant relative of his father. We shall therefore look at these tablets in two different contexts: first as classroom material and secondly as items in Ipqu-Annunitum's house.

As the scribe Sin-naṣir was Ipiq-Aya's father we also know who taught him how to write. Sin-naṣir was quite old by the time that Ipiq-Aya—presumably one of his younger children—started his studies, because he had been writing tablets as a scribe for at least 42 years by then. By this time he no longer worked as a contract scribe but his eyesight and dexterity were clearly still up to the job, as we know from a tantalizing piece of evidence. In Ur-Utu's house (Tanret in this volume) an unusual tablet about a commercial partnership with Šamaš was found, which in writing and contents resembles a document from before the reign of Hammurabi, except that it carries an impression of one of Sin-naṣir's seals which cannot have been cut before the 8th year of Ammi-ṣaduqa (Van Lerberghe and Voet 1991b: no. 7; Voet and Van Lerberghe 1993: 45; Veenhof 2004: 559–560). One way of interpreting this tablet is as a sample for students to copy, with the teacher impressing his own seal to add to the sense of realism (for more scribal exercises from the same room see Tanret 2002: nos. 50–51), even if we cannot explain why an archaic writing ductus was chosen for a copying exercise. Whatever purpose the tablet may have had, it shows that Sin-naṣir still taught during his retirement years, including one or more of Ur-Utu's children.

The compositions studied by Ipiq-Aya and his contemporaries reveal a very different choice of texts than we are familiar with at Nippur and Ur, or for that matter at Sippar in the time of Hammurabi (Tinney 1999: 168). Between that date and the reign of Ammi-ṣaduqa the scribal curriculum was overhauled, with parts of the old Sumerian repertoire consigned to oblivion and works of Akkadian literature for the first time brought into the centre, including *Atram-hasis*, the legends of Naram-Sin, and the Laws of Hammurabi. Space was kept for Sumerian compositions, such as *The Three Ox-Drivers from Adab* and a number of others that we know from Sippar and, later, Ugarit and Hattusa but which are not attested in the Sumerian cities of the 18th century BC. Only a few classical Sumerian texts may have continued to receive attention, among them *The Ur Lament* that was copied by Ipiq-Aya, but this composition too is no longer attested after the Old Babylonian period. We should be careful not to take the tablets that we have associated with our apprentice scribe as some kind of standard, because it is unlikely that a new curriculum paradigm had been set comparable with the old Sumerian Decad (Tinney in this volume) of before. But new trends are unmistakable if we see what literary texts were studied in late Old Babylonian Sippar and, a few centuries later, in the western periphery of cuneiform culture.

The storage of Ipiq-Aya's student work within the living archive of the judge Ipqu-Annunitum offers a fresh perspective on the later use of school tablets. From practices at Nippur and Ur we have become familiar with the idea that scribal exercises served no further purposes once class was over, but clearly the same cannot be said

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about the elaborate tablets written by Ipiq-Aya. Lambert and Millard (1969: 5) already remarked that his tablets of *Atram-hasis* do not resemble schoolwork, given their polished look, experienced handwriting, their size, and their serial colophons. The presence of full year name formulas reminds us of the prayer written by Sin-naṣir many years before, and it is likely that this was how this teacher insisted that sophisticated manuscripts should look. The dates also prove that they were written as part of advanced scribal schooling, and we should therefore accept that these tablets were subsequently appreciated for their content and carefully preserved until the end of the archive more than six years later. We are, however, groping in the dark for the reasons why *Atram-hasis* and the other manuscripts ended up with Ipqu-Annunitum. Did the judge inherit them after Sin-naṣir's death, or had he perhaps commissioned them from his scribal relatives? We have no evidence to support any particular alternative but still prefer yet another possibility, namely that Ipiq-Aya had given them by way of introduction, as masterpieces of his scribal art, in order to solicit a favour and an entree into the court circles of Babylon with which Ipqu-Annunitum was intimately familiar.

However these tablets entered Ipqu-Annunitum's house, we may assume that they continued to be useful in their new setting, by being studied, recited or perhaps copied by other young scribes. They were surely not the only literary manuscripts in this house but must have joined a library that still needs to be pieced together from the tablets that are available in the pertinent museum collections—a daunting task whenever names or dates are not included. Wilcke (1999: 69 n. 11) has pointed out that Ipiq-Aya did not copy his three tablets of *Atram-hasis* in the right sequence and suggested that he may have produced two full sets. Indeed, there is some reason to believe that more of the Sippar copies of *Atram-hasis* stand in some relation to his version: MSS E and D of tablet I and II agree almost word for word with Ipiq-Aya's MSS A and B and moreover share the unusual spelling *pí-a-šu*. But only a comparison of the handwriting may clarify whether these tablets are his work, or perhaps that of his father, Sin-naṣir, or yet another scribe. Be that as it may, there is a fair chance that they come from this same house from which tablets have been dispersed far and wide. This would give *Atram-hasis* even more prominence among the literary materials from Ipqu-Annunitum's house, and bolster the idea that this composition was studied by members of his family not so much because of its accepted curricular status, but because they were particularly fond of it.

All performances of *Atram-hasis* have disappeared without trace but we can be confident to have found at least one house where we can imagine this form of entertainment without difficulty. Whether the telling of the story followed the written versions that were standing on the shelf, or were more freely improvised, we shall never know, but we can be sure that it enthralled the audience. *Atram-hasis* is an exciting, dramatic story that provokes its listeners to think about the fundamentals of their lives—birth, death, and the bond with the gods—by situating it in the deep mythological past. This past was no lost world, but one inhabited by somebody just like these men: Atram-hasis, the loyal servant of Enki. Sin-naṣir, Ipqu-Annunitum, Ipiq-Aya, and their relatives will have had

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no problem in empathizing with the troubles of a fellow Enki worshipper, and sharing in his final triumph, thanks to their divine master, with particular delight.[1]

Further reading

The classic monograph on Sippar in the Old Babylonian period is Harris (1975), which is now in serious need of revision; the 19th-century excavations and the archives excavated then are discussed by Kalla (1999) and van Koppen (2003–04). A few scribes of Sippar have been discussed in articles (e.g. Tanret 2004) but no systematic study has yet been undertaken. Names of scribes working in Sippar known at that time have been collected in Harris (1975: 106–109, 284–302). The discussion of the scribal profession by Kraus (1973) is very much worth reading. Some aspects of the archive of Ipqu-Annunitum the judge are discussed by Stol (2004: 932–935) and Tanret (2004: 36–39). For the genealogy of Sin-naṣir see Jonker (1995: 226–231), Van der Toorn (1996: 52–55) and Radner (2005: 85–87).

For the story of *Atram-hasis* see Lambert and Millard (1969; edition) and Shehata (2001; bibliography), with George (2003: 507–508) discussing the crucial point of natural death first having been imposed upon humankind after the Flood; see also Katz (2005). Important interpretative studies can be found in Moran (2002) and Wilcke (1999).

For Mesopotamian funerary and memorial rites (*kispum*) see Tsukimoto (1985; 2010). Collon (2005) is an excellent and concise introduction to Mesopotamian cylinder seals, providing good examples and further bibliography. For the psychology of seal design see Wiggermann (1985–86; 2003). For Old Babylonian family gods see Charpin (1990) and Van der Toorn (1996: Chapter 4).

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[1] I thank the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to study cuneiform tablets in their collection. Gratitude is due to the authors of the Catalogue of the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum, without which the research for this paper could not have been conducted, and to the staff of the Middle East Department of the British Museum for their continued hospitality and support.

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CHAPTER 8

FEASTS FOR THE LIVING, THE DEAD, AND THE GODS

HAGAN BRUNKE

EATING and drinking are not just the necessary means of sustaining life but also a matter of prestige. Public eating, in the shape of feasts and banquets, is one of the most important activities for establishing, maintaining, and developing a community's social bonds, structures, and hierarchies. Therefore questions such as who consumed which foods on which occasions, and how that food was prepared and served provide revealing perspectives on any society, whether modern or ancient. They offer insights not only into the character of the society as a whole but also into the texture of individuals' lives, on both normal and special days.

Communal feasting was a hallmark of Mesopotamian society, with banquets an integral part of all public festivals. Food and drink also served to confirm the community's relationship with the gods, through the exquisite delicacies presented to them as offerings. And eating and drinking were a matter of individual social prestige too: the quality, variety, and amounts of foodstuffs that someone served or received reflected their social rank and status. This chapter will focus on southern Mesopotamia in the late third millennium BC. There is admittedly a lack of archaeological evidence from this time, and an absence of procedural or prescriptive texts that would amount to recipes for specific dishes or protocols for specific feasts. However, much relevant information can be extracted from the administrative documents, which survive in huge numbers, especially from the 21st century BC, when the so-called Third Dynasty of Ur ruled over a centralized state that encompassed the southern half of what is modern Iraq (the Ur III period). Since the intention behind writing these texts was purely bureaucratic, the data is extremely accurate and reliable, although the information provided on specific recipes is normally indirect. The relevant evidence must be collected by comparing and analysing the internal structure of many such

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texts, making detective work out of the reconstruction of recipes for various dishes and the composition of banquet menus.

The sources, their potential and their limitations

The great importance of Mesopotamian public feasts is clearly reflected in many types of evidence. The calendar was organized around festivals, which often had months named after them (Steele in this volume). A great many business records of administrative bodies deal with all kinds of goods, usually in large amounts, earmarked for the preparation of feasts. Banquet scenes showing people eating and drinking together are a popular motif on cylinder seals of the third millennium BC (Figure 8.1), and on other objects such as the so-called 'Standard of Ur', possibly the sound box of an instrument (Figure 8.2). But as to the food itself, there is insufficient archaeological evidence to allow us to reconstruct recipes or the preparation methods for particular dishes or foods. Of course material remains, such as certain types of pottery, can be identified as cooking or storage vessels, while many domestic fireplaces and ovens have been excavated (e.g. Ellison 1984). But unlike in Egypt, for example, no actual foodstuffs have survived at all.

FIGURE 8.1 Lapis lazuli cylinder seal with a banqueting scene: from the so-called Queen's Grave of the Early Dynastic Royal Cemetery of Ur (British Museum, ME 121545). The lower register shows two servants, one of whom holds a spouted vessel, attending two seated men whose raised cups will have contained wine. Another wine drinker and his attendant are shown in the upper register, which in addition features a seated man and a woman drinking through long straws from a big jar of what is in all likelihood beer (cf. Figure 8.4). In the lower register, there is also food on a stand. (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website: http://tinyurl.com/3vhfsjh).

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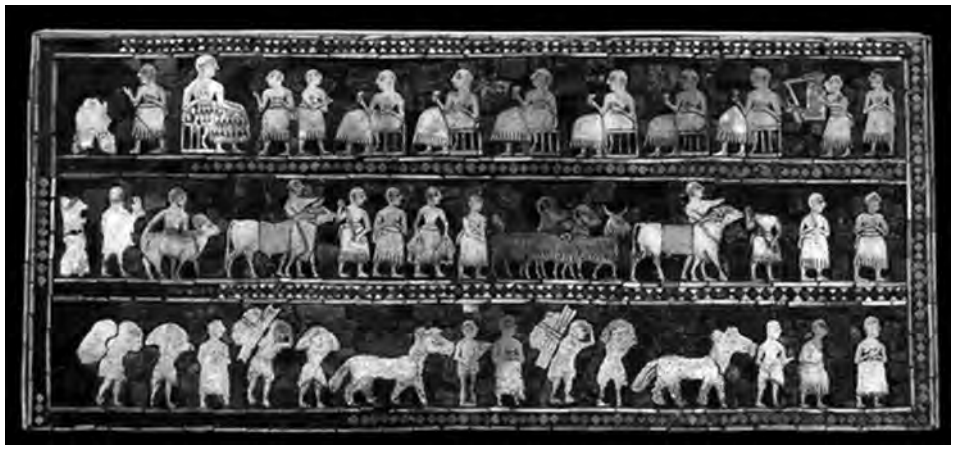

FIGURE 8.2 The top scene from the 'Peace panel' of the so-called 'Standard of Ur', showing a banquet with seated men drinking to the accompaniment of a musician playing a lyre (British Museum, ME 121201 (U.11164)). The 'Standard of Ur' was excavated in the largest grave of the Early Dynastic Royal Cemetery of Ur; while its exact function remains unknown, it is possible that it is the soundbox of a musical instrument. (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website: http://tinyurl.com/236blb7)

In our attempts to reconstruct Sumerian cuisine we are therefore almost exclusively dependent on textual sources, bearing in mind that the Ur III evidence does not provide us with recipes in the modern sense of instructions on how to cook an actual dish. Instead, information about ingredients and methods of food preparation has to be gained indirectly, especially from documents in institutional archives. There are, for example, lists of various palace personnel and the food rations they received as (part) payment for their work, as well as stock breeding accounts, administrative records of agriculture and horticulture, and lists of the goods provided by institutions for public festivals or temple offerings.

Many texts among the last group deal with foods such as grains and flours, bread and beer, fruit and vegetables, meat and fish. Some contain explanations naming the dish to be prepared from these products—for instance, declaring that flours or combinations of flours are destined 'for bread' (often a specific type or quality), or grain products, pulses, and spices 'for soup'. We are thus able to reconstruct ingredient lists for certain dishes such as breads, soups, or sweets. And once a sufficient amount of information on typical ingredients, the sequence of products, and the occasions of their preparation is gathered from these more explicit documents, parallel texts, which lack precise explanations, can also be identified and used to help reconstruct Sumerian cuisine. This line of research has only just begun and it is to be hoped that many more dishes will become known in the future.

While administrative texts generally provide a detailed and unbiased record of certain aspects of Mesopotamian everyday life, the very fact that they are purely bureaucratic

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poses difficulties for historians trying to extract data from them, in our case on the Sumerian culinary arts (for general methodological considerations see Brunke 2011b). Administrative texts listing the ingredients for, say, a soup were of course never meant to serve as recipes. They were not written in order to record or transmit the knowledge necessary in order to prepare a particular type of soup. The scribes' only intention was to record the ingoing or outgoing flows of goods and their authorization. Explanations such as 'for bread', 'for soup', or even more verbose examples like 'soup has been cooked and bread has been baked', serve only to contextualize the administrative transaction more precisely. They are not required components of the documentation; indeed, more often than not they are missing. And even if such a specification is given we cannot assume that the list contains all the products needed for the soup in question as the ingredients may have come in several deliveries that were recorded in different documents, or may have already been in the kitchen. For example, some lists of ingredients for a fish sauce (Sumerian ku_6 al-u(s)$_2$-sa) mention spices and salt but not the fish, which was apparently delivered separately (Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 1162, ii 44'–47'). Yet other such lists can certainly be considered complete and we will focus on these in the following discussion.

Another key problem is that surviving information only concerns food that was prepared under the aegis of an administrative institution, for example on the occasion of a royal banquet. Therefore very little is known about the everyday eating habits of the general population. Administrative texts inform us that members of the workforce such as craftsmen and agricultural labourers received food in the form of regular allocations as remuneration for their work. These consisted of monthly allocations mainly of barley, either unprocessed or processed as flour, and sesame oil, together with less frequent allotments of non-dietary items such as wool and clothes. Based on this evidence, one may assume that ordinary people ate bread, porridge, and simple soups which were prepared at home. Our sources do not tell us whether they supplemented this basic diet with foodstuffs acquired from elsewhere or home-grown produce (see Wiggermann in this volume).

In the following, our case study will be the Ur III city of Garšana, from where rich new evidence has been recently published (Owen and Mayr 2008; Kleinerman and Owen 2009). Although the tablets from Garšana were discovered only recently, their original archaeological context is entirely lost as they were not excavated in official, supervised excavations; even Garšana's location is unknown but it was undoubtedly in the district administered by the city of Umma. Almost nothing is known about the city and its history, but it was linked to, and probably geographically close to, an estate belonging first to a man called Šukabta, a general and physician, and after his death to the princess Simat-Ištaran, who was quite possibly his widow. We have no further biographical information about these individuals, but Šukabta's high social position is reflected by the large and elaborate offering feast held after his death (Owen and Mayr 2008; Heimpel 2009).

The remnants of Šukabta's estate documentation are today known as the Garšana Archives, comprising some 1500 administrative tablets dealing with matters such as comestibles, textile and leather production, and construction work. The Garšana materials' key attraction for the modern researcher is their unusally loquacious recording

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style compared to the extremely numerous but often terse sources from elsewhere in the Ur III kingdom. While the great detail given in the Garšana texts allows for the identification and reconstruction of the dishes and menus described here, identical or similar dishes are attested in administrative records from other places, as we shall see. The cuisine of Garšana can be considered typical for southern Mesopotamia in the late third millennium BC.

Public feasting: Banquets in honour of gods, kings, and the dead

Some of the Garšana texts provide detailed information about the exact purpose of various foodstuffs and their preparation, including the amount of fuel needed for cooking a soup or baking bread. In one case even the amount of the resulting soup is recorded, which in turn allows us to reconstruct its texture. Feasts in honour of the deceased Šukabta, too, are documented in three texts, as are banquets held during the festivities for various deities. This section is concerned with the foodstuffs served on these occasions while the following part will deal with the on-site catering provided for the workers on Šukabta's estate.

Feasts in honour of gods

Some Garšana texts contain complete records of all goods provided by the estate administration on the occasion of certain festivities. One of them gives a detailed account of the comestibles, the cooking fuel, and even the soup bowls for the preparation of the banquets held in honour of five deities, in five parallel sections (Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 1025; Figure 8.3). According to the dating of the tablet, all five banquets took place within a single month. The Sumerian name for such a banquet is kaš-de$_2$-a, literally 'beer serving', and it therefore comes as no surprise that the delivery accounts start with beer. The subsequent entries give amounts of several types of bread. As an example we will look at the fourth of the five sections, which deals with a banquet in honour of the goddess Inana of the City. Its first six entries read:

> 450 litres of ordinary beer;
> 8 litres of big loaves of a special sort of emmer bread, made from 1 litre of flour apiece;
> 69 litres of big loaves of ordinary bread, made from 1 litre of flour apiece;
> $4\frac{5}{6}$ litres of bread made from a particularly fine barley flour, (of) second quality;
> $88\frac{5}{6}$ litres of bread made from standard barley flour;
> 130 litres of 'draff bread'.

Bread (Sumerian ninda) was certainly the most important foodstuff. There was a rich terminology for many different types of bread, a small selection of which was served at

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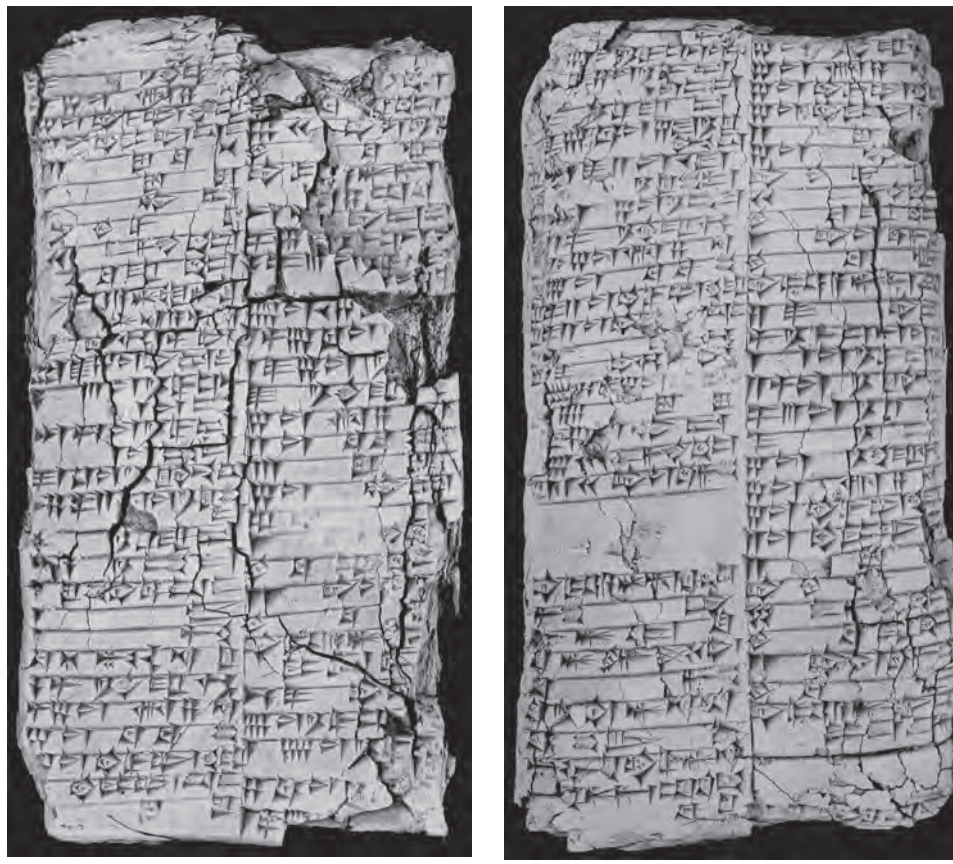

FIGURE 8.3 Administrative tablet from ancient Garšana, recording the delivery of beer, bread, meat, and various soup ingredients for five banquets in honour of five different deities (CUNES 52-04-054; Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 1025). (Photos published with the permission of David I. Owen, Curator of Tablet Collections, Jonathan and Jeannette Rosen Ancient Near Eastern Seminar, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA)

Inana's banquet. Some occur regularly in texts recording food deliveries for all kind of occasions, while others are much more rarely documented and may have been rather special. Bread names are always given in the form ninda X, where X denotes the quality (e.g. ninda gin 'ordinary bread' or ninda saga$_{10}$ 'good bread'), the size (e.g. ninda gal 'big-loaf bread') or the type of bread (e.g. ninda dabin 'bread of standard barley flour'). Or X may refer to the bread's shape, as in ninda ga-ga-ar-tum, 'disc-shaped bread', one of the rarer types of loaf. X can also denote the amount of flour needed for one loaf of bread, for instance, ninda 1 sila$_3$ du$_8$ 'bread (one loaf of which is) baked (from) 1 litre (of flour)'. As the Ur III capacity measure sila$_3$ approximately corresponds to 1 litre (an equivalence used throughout this chapter) this gives us a good idea of this loaf's size. Two or even more of these attributes could be combined, resulting in unwieldy constructions such as

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ninda zi_3 $ša_3$-DU zi_3 milla ib_2-ta-hi 1/2 $sila_3$ du_8 'bread (made from the flour types) $ša_3$-DU (and) milla (which) have been mixed, (one loaf of which is) baked (from) 1/2 litre (of flour)' (Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 1079, l. 2).

There is a commonly held opinion, based on excavation results and modern parallels (Ellison 1984: 90–91), that the people of ancient Mesopotamia mostly baked pitta-like bread on the inner surface of open-topped, bell-shaped ovens with thick walls and an opening for fuel near the ground, like the *tannur* ovens widely used in the Middle East today. (The Akkadian term *tinūrum*, 'oven', is of course related to Arabic *tannur*.) However, it is clear that a loaf made with a litre of flour cannot be of the flat, pitta type. Many other bread types recorded in the administrative documentation seem to have been loaf-shaped rather than pittas, and perhaps this is also true of some homemade bread, which could have been prepared as loaves by putting the dough into hot ash. But large institutions probably baked loaves of bread inside domed ovens such as those from Old Babylonian Ur and Mari (Miglus 2003: 40).

A good number of bread names cannot yet be interpreted properly; even for those whose names indicate their size, shape, and/or flour, we do not know much more. In a few cases, however, we can deduce from the extant data additional parameters such as the density of the bread (Brunke 2011a: 114). It turns out that Sumerian bread types had a solid consistency similar to the bread types typical of modern Central Europe. Further, none of the known ingredient lists for breads includes salt or spices, and nor are these items ever involved in bread preparation in any other context. While we cannot exclude that spice breads hide behind some of the many unidentified names, we can at least assume that Sumerian bread was unsalted: the advantage of unsalted bread is that it does not attract humidity and mould and therefore keeps better than salted bread.

There were also sweetened breads, such as a kind of fruit bread or cake (Sumerian ninda gug_2 or simply gug_2, Akkadian *kukku*) made of flour (usually emmer flour), dates, and sesame oil. This is clearly a refined and special dish as it is mentioned only rarely in the administrative documentation. In two texts from Umma it is destined for the moon-god Suen and the deified king Amar-Suen (Sauren 1978: no. 81; Schneider 1931: no. 242). One of the ingredient lists provides us with a recipe for a luxury version of this dish, called 'great cake' (gug_2 gu-la) (Yıldız and Ozaki 2000: no. 3513; cf. Brunke 2011a: 132). It contains two kinds of flour of the highest quality, dates, raisins, cheese, and, instead of the usual sesame oil, butter fat (Sumerian i_3-nun, literally 'princely fat'). Because of this last ingredient we can link this luxury cake with a goddess's 'ghee cake' or 'butter cake' in the Sumerian myth of Inana and Enki (gug_2 i_3-nun; Stol 1993–97: 197; ETCSL 1.3.1, C 9).

In many respects, the limitations of our knowledge of Sumerian bread mirror our incomplete understanding of Sumerian beer (Powell 1994; Stol 1987–90; 1994). The ingredients for several types of beer are known by name, but not all have been identified with certainty. And very little is known about the brewing process itself, or about the properties and quality of the resulting beers. It is generally assumed that it contained relatively little alcohol and it has also been suggested that (at least some kinds of) beer were actually a type of kvass, a drink made from fermented bread and of very

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FIGURE 8.4 Fragment of a drinking straw made out of a bent bronze sheet (c.1 mm thick): from a cremation burial excavated at Dur-Katlimmu, modern Tell Sheikh Hamad, Syria (excavation number SH 03/5751/0231; on Dur-Katlimmu see Kühne 2008). Additional fragments found in the same spot indicate that the complete straw had a length of about 50 cm. Its tip is perforated, with holes of 1–2 mm in diameter serving as a sieve to filter the solid remainders of the brewing process out of the beer. The burial dates to a time between the late 7th and mid-6th centuries BC (Kreppner 2008). (Photo © excavation project Tell Sheikh Hamad, Freie Universität Berlin, courtesy Hartmut Kühne)

low alcohol content (Stol 1987–90: 325; Powell 1994: 91–92). To avoid the solid by-products of fermentation, beer was drunk through a drinking straw (Figure 8.4).

Returning to the banquet for Inana, the account continues:

5 litres of good-quality groats,
5 litres of arzana,
5 litres of milled beans,
5 litres of mashed peas,
meat of 2 sheep,
5 litres of ordinary-quality salt:
into the big cooking pots.
20 bundles of reeds: soup has been cooked with them.
60 1-litre jars (of) soup have been made.

The section closes with a reference to the reason for these deliveries: 'a banquet (for) Inana of the City'. The note 'into the big cooking pots' refers to the preceding list of ingredients (but of course not to the bread and beer previously mentioned). We can therefore identify the grain products groats and arzana (a barley derivative of uncertain nature, see Milano 1993–97: 27; Brunke 2011a: 32–34), pulses, meat, and salt as ingredients for soup. That it was indeed soup prepared in the cooking pots follows from the explanation given for the reed bundles: 'soup has been cooked with them'. Unsurprisingly, there is no mention of the amount of water needed to cook this mutton, bean, and barley soup, but the final passage provides us with information about the resulting quantity—60 litres—and thus with all data needed to reconstruct the complete recipe.

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The soup recipes for the other four banquets recorded in our text are very similar. The complexity and detail of the explanations that allow us to reconstruct the full recipe are otherwise unmatched in Sumerian administrative documents, where one can otherwise expect the simple entry 'into the big cooking pots', if anything at all.

If 20 litres of starchy ingredients—the barley products and pulses—combined with the meat of two sheep and the remarkably high quantity of five litres of salt resulted in only 60 litres of soup, the final product must have been an extremely stiff and salty mash. We should therefore assume that the mash in the 1-litre jars was not served in this way but rather that it was a concentrate that would later have been diluted to a consistency better fit for consumption. One possible reason for preparing concentrate rather than actual soup was the desire to save fuel. However, it remains unclear whether the Sumerian word tu_7, traditionally translated as 'soup', should be generally interpreted in light of this evidence as 'soup concentrate' or whether the term designates both soup stock and ready-to-eat soup.

All together the records for Inana's banquet feature 450 litres of beer and slightly more than 300 litres of bread together with our Scotch broth-type mutton, bean, and barley soup. The latter alone would be sufficient to feed about 200 people, and it is therefore a reasonable assumption that the banquet was attended by a group of about this size. From this it follows, first, that each of the guests was provided with up to 2 litres of beer and, second, that they took (some of) the bread away for consumption at home. There are good arguments in favour of this last hypothesis. On the one hand, a significantly higher number of participants would have been needed to consume a total of 300 litres of bread during the feast, about 800 people, but then the 450 litres of beer seems insufficient. The discrepancy is even more pronounced for the other banquets recorded on our tablet. And on the other hand, the first entries concerning the banquet in honour of 'Ninsiana, personal god of Ahu'a' (Sumerian ^{d}nin-^{d}si_4-an-na *a-hu-a*) include no bread at all, which indicates that bread was not a necessary part of the feast. To return to Inana's feast, it is likely that the two more valuable bread types, made only in comparatively small amounts, were reserved for the highest-ranking guests, who may also have received a somewhat larger quantity of beer than the other participants.

Even though the ingredient lists for the five banquets are very similar with regard to their structure and the goods involved, they show considerable differences in the amounts of products consumed and thus the size of the banquet, reflecting a hierarchy in the relative importance of the deities to whom the festivals were dedicated. The biggest of the five was the feast held in honour of the goddess Inana of Zabala, the second entry on our tablet. 1935 litres of beer were given out, 30 litres of which are explicitly declared to be of higher quality and thus presumably reserved for the highest-ranking participants, as were the better qualities of the seven different types of bread, altogether 2128 litres. The soup was prepared from 160 litres of grain and pulse products (with 130 litres of 'good-quality groats' as the major ingredient), meat from an unknown (now missing) number of sheep and (probably) 15 litres of salt. This soup alone would feed about 1600 people, who would also have received 1 litre of beer and bread each, with the highest-ranking guests getting a somewhat bigger and better share.

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Feasts in honour of the king

Banquets of a similar size are attested at the city of Puzriš-Dagan (modern Drehem). The relevant administrative text is detailed and complex (Sigrist 2000: no. 1103). It documents deliveries of various products, including non-comestibles, whose common purpose is identified at the end as kaš-de$_2$-a lugal-še$_3$ 'for royal banquet(s)', that is, feasts held in honour of the reigning king. Yet the ingredient lists for specific purposes, such as 'for (a special type) of bread' or 'for sweets' are definitely incomplete, with the notable exception of two passages (obverse, ii 19–iii 6 and iii 9–17). These parallel the lists of soup ingredients in the Garšana texts and can therefore be identified as such, even without a formal identification such as 'for soup' or 'for the cooking pots'. And as the soup was certainly served on two separate occasions, it becomes evident that the records document not one but two royal banquets.

Yet the volume of items such as flour delivered for baking bread and ingredients for two types of sweets is so immense that it is inconceivable that they would have served for just two banquets. The Puzriš-Dagan text is a typical example of a summary of deliveries and transactions occurring within one particular month. It was not written in order to provide a sequential record of festivities but simply to account for the products delivered and the people responsible for their delivery. The lack of more detailed information prevents us from identifying their exact purpose of use or associating them with particular banquets. Only some of the foodstuffs enumerated in this text can therefore be linked to two of the banquets in honour of the king, while the purpose of others remains unclear.

To return to the soup served at the royal feasts, the two passages run as follows:

40 litres of milled beans;	20 litres of milled beans;
40 litres of mashed peas;	20 litres of mashed peas;
40 litres of good-quality groats;	20 litres of good-quality groats;
40 litres of arzana;	30 litres of arzana;
	15 litres of emmer flour of good quality:
25 litres of ground 'good spice';	15 litres of ground 'good spice';
[...]	
20 litres of ground coriander;	10 litres of ground coriander;
20 litres of gazi-plant (a common spice);	
20 litres of flour of an unknown spice seed;	
20 litres of ground white cumin;	2 litres of ground white cumin;
40 litres of salt.	30 litres of salt.

At least as far as the seasoning is concerned, these recipes are superior to the soups served at Garšana during banquets for the gods, but on the other hand they contain no meat at all. The soup is very similar to that served on an occasion in honour of Šukabta, the then deceased head of estate in the Garšana Archives, which we will discuss below. How much bread, beer, and sweets were given out at each of the two royal banquets held

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at Puzriš-Dagan remains unclear, but one could reasonably expect ratios between the different foodstuffs to be similar to the Garšana banquets for the gods. Therefore, to judge from the soup prepared, there were at least 1500–2000 guests at the first banquet.

The food served at such a banquet in honour of the king was by no means identical to the food consumed by the king, his family, and the high officials. In so far as we can reconstruct the menu at the royal table from various palace delivery accounts, fruits and vegetables, milk products, poultry, fish, and various kinds of meat were regular components of the nutrition of this highest stratum of society. Like the participants in the feasts discussed so far, the royal family would also have eaten bread and soups and drunk beer (and possibly wine), but these dishes were generally of the highest quality, better than even the best items served at the banquets.

Feasts in honour of the dead

So far, we have encountered public feasts in honour of gods or the reigning king. The dead were also celebrated like this, at least when they were of high rank and social status. Three tablets from Garšana provide detailed accounts of the menu served at such a celebration (Sumerian ki-a-nag) in honour of the late Šukabta, the head of the estate documented by the Garšana archives. Whereas beer and bread are listed as finished products in the records of the banquets for the gods, and only the soup ingredients are listed separately, these texts give the ingredients for all foods served. In a text dating to about two and a half years after Šukabta's death (Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 981), the section listing foodstuffs runs as follows:

> 180 litres of a particularly fine barley flour, best quality,
> 260 litres of standard barley flour,
> 54 litres of a special type of emmer flour,
> 60 litres of another special type of emmer flour, best quality: for bread.
> 6 litres of flour made out of a special sort of emmer,
> 1 litre of sesame oil,
> 2 litres of dates: for sweets.
> 10 litres of good-quality groats,
> 10 litres of arzana,
> 10 litres of milled beans,
> 10 litres of mashed peas,
> 5 litres of ground good spices,
> 6 litres of ground coriander,
> 5 litres of ground good salt,
> 10 1/3 litres of ground gazi-plant (a common spice),
> 30 bundles of an unknown spice plant: for the cooking pot (i.e., for soup).

Bread is prepared using the considerable quantity of 554 litres of flour, of four different types. The names of these and many other types of flour recorded in the Ur III documentation are difficult to translate precisely (Milano 1993–97: 25–27), and in some cases

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the subject of scholarly controversy. For convenience, I have refrained from entering these murky waters and merely paraphrase the Sumerian terms as, for instance, 'a special type of emmer flour' or 'a particularly fine barley flour'. Even though the text does not reveal the types of bread produced, we may assume a variety of breads similar to the banquets for the gods: comparisons with other administrative documents allow us to determine that the two sorts of emmer flour listed in our text were used to prepare the emmer bread attested in our record of the five banquets for the gods (Brunke 2011a: 130–131). Compared to the other types of flour, relatively small amounts are given for these two, reflecting their higher value and quality; we have already made the analogous observation for the 'special sort of emmer bread' itself. The two barley flours in the present text, too, were probably processed into the same barley breads made for the divine banquets. Bread baked from 554 litres of flour feeds a lot more people than soup made from 40 litres of grain and pulse products, so again we can assume that much of it was to be taken home instead of being eaten at the feast.

After the bread section, the ingredients for a certain type of sweet (Sumerian nig$_2$-i$_3$-de$_2$-a) are listed. While not attested for the Garšana banquets for the gods, it was served at the feasts in honour of the king at Puzriš-Dagan. The ingredient lists for this sweet always contain fat (either butter or sesame oil) and dates, sometimes also cheese and in one case dried grapes (Brunke 2011a: 203–207). Flour (mostly emmer flour) is often, but not always, mentioned as an additional ingredient. Evidence from other administrative texts indicates that this flour was used to prepare a sort of dough, quite possibly for small biscuits which were then served together with the product resulting from the other ingredients. On the basis of my own experiments, these were probably turned into a smooth paste which can be easily spread on the bread or biscuits. This suggests an understanding of nig$_2$-i$_3$-de$_2$-a as 'sweet spread (served on biscuits)'. Our text gives 1 litre of sesame oil and 2 litres of dates for the spread and 6 litres of flour for the biscuits.

The next section concerns the ingredients for the soup, which was prepared from some 40 litres of starchy substances and must have been sufficient to feed up to 400 people. This is again out of proportion with the much larger amount of bread served. In addition to the by now expected grain and pulse products, the ingredients include a comparatively wide range of flavourings: salt and four kinds of spices which, apart from coriander, are not yet clearly identified. The gazi-plant, at least, can be considered part of standard seasoning and is attested extremely frequently. Like the soup served at Puzriš-Dagan in honour of the king but unlike the soup served at the Garšana banquets for the gods, this soup served in honour of the late Šukabta contained no meat. However, the soup served for two of Šukabta's earlier ki-a-nag festivals, held two and eleven months after his death, did contain fish (Owen and Mayr 2008: nos. 975 and 972).

Following the entries for bread, pudding, and soup, small amounts of half a litre each of cress and another—unidentified—spice or vegetable are listed, but without a specific purpose being mentioned for them. Because of the limited amounts, these products may have been reserved for only a few guests, in all likelihood the highest-ranking participants, but perhaps they were intended as an offering to the dead Šukabta. The following list of items constitutes the ingredients for 300 litres of 'good beer' (kaš saga$_{10}$; additional

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ordinary beer was served at Šukabta's earlier memorial feasts). This figure matches the estimate of up to 400 participants suggested by the amount of soup.

An administrative text from Umma (Gomi and Yıldız 1993: no. 2053) contains a list of foodstuffs similar to the ones used for Šukabta's memorial feast. It records a delivery for a ki-a-nag festival in memory of the dead kings Šulgi and Amar-Suen, the second and third rulers of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Although our Umma text is not dated it must have been written during the reign of Šu-Suen or Ibbi-Suen, the two last rulers of the line; the historical context favours Šu-Suen. Although there are no explanatory remarks such as 'for bread' and so on, comparisons with the other ki-a-nag texts, especially the one just considered, allow us to deduce that the bread was baked from 'particularly fine barley flour, best quality' (amount lost) and that the other foodstuffs were used to prepare a soup similar to the one in our Garšana text (Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 981).

Memorial feasts in honour of deceased kings and local dignitaries were a regular feature of communal life. The range and the number of participants in the feast depended on the (local) importance of the dead and, judging from the records of the three banquets honouring the late Šukabta, apparently also on the amount of time that had passed since the person's death; the economic situation at different times may have had an effect, too. Individuals of lesser importance were also honoured in such a way, but of course on a smaller scale. Surviving records list deliveries of small amounts of food such as a few litres of beer or one or two sheep for the ki-a-nag celebrations of cultic personnel, their parents, and various officials (e.g. Sigrist 1993: no. 260).

Feeding the workforce

This section of the chapter deals with catering for the workforce and therefore everyday food rather than meals served at festive occasions. Again, we find that the main staple was soup served with bread and sometimes also beer. But the attested soups are much simpler than those served during the communal banquets. They often contain no pulses, salt or spices at all but only grain products, sometimes only the already familiar 'good-quality groats' which we can therefore see as the base ingredient of Sumerian soup. Here is an example of the provision of two kinds of bread and a very basic groat soup to some hired workers (Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 490):

240 litres of bread made out of a mixture of standard barley flour and a slightly better barley flour;
92 litres of thick bread made from a special type of emmer flour.
10 litres of good-quality groats for the cooking pot.
The hired workers of various towns have eaten it.

The workers receiving the food are said to be from 'various towns', meaning that they did not live in Garšana and thus had to be fed during their stay there. While it is not clear what kind of labour this hired workforce performed for Šukabta's estate, they

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may have been working on a construction site as they are listed alongside professional builders in another text (Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 483; for workers at Garšana see Heimpel 2009). Both hired workers and builders receive bread and soup, but of different qualities, reflecting the workers' differing statuses: the hired workers get a simple groat soup while the soup served to the specialized builders contains groats (4 litres) and processed pulses, namely milled beans (10 litres) and mashed peas (3 litres), familiar to us from the soups served at the communal banquets. While there is strong evidence that the resulting soup was consumed in a single day, together with 176 litres of three different types of bread, we unfortunately do not know by how many builders.

The correlation between food quality and the status of the recipients is highlighted by another text which shows some cultic singers receiving a rather superior soup of fish and the obligatory 'good-quality groats', together with bread and beer (Owen and Mayr 2008: no. 437). As the fish is counted as a unit rather than by capacity measure, it must have been fairly large. It is described as 'split', indicating that it had been gutted and possibly salted and/or dried for preservation (Englund 1990: 211–212):

> 12 litres of bread.
> 10 litres of ordinary beer.
> Half a litre of good-quality groats (and)
> 1 split fish: for the cooking pot.
> The cultic singers (have eaten it).

While until recently not very much at all could be said about Sumerian soups, thanks to the detailed Garšana materials we now know not only the recipes for a number of soups but also, and perhaps more importantly, that soups of different qualities played a key role among Sumerian foodstuffs and their quality reflected the relative importance of the occasion and the consumers within the community. The publication of the administrative records from the city of Iri-Sagrig (Owen forthcoming) will allow us to expand our still limited insights into the social meaning of soup, by providing further examples of how soup was served to different kinds of personnel.

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to highlight the potential as well as the problems of using administrative documents—one of the most common outputs of cuneiform culture—for reconstructing living conditions in ancient Sumer, focusing on food and food consumption. The character of the administrative documentation of the large institutions operating within the Ur III state determined the focus of our discussion on two subject areas: communal feasting and catering for workers. The rich data from the Garšana archives, with its wordy explanatory notes elucidating the specific purpose of the food deliveries, constituted our main source and allowed us to interpret parallel texts from

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elsewhere along the same lines, suggesting that our findings for Garšana can be considered typical for southern Mesopotamia at the close of the third millennium BC.

The Garšana archives, and other sources, allowed us to gain insight into the dishes served, their recipes, and the composition and size of banquets. The menu served at Garšana's communal feasts typically consisted of several sorts of bread, a high quality soup, and sometimes a pudding, always accompanied by beer. Rough estimates indicate several hundred participants. Such feasts took place regularly and quite often (Sallaberger 1993). For example, all five of the banquets in honour of gods recorded in our main source from Garšana took place within one month, while the memorial banquets in honour of deceased kings and dignitaries were certainly held more than once a year, perhaps even monthly. The importance of these feasts for social life and community identity is obvious.

With the exception of a pudding sweetened with dates, mention of fruits and vegetables is entirely lacking in the context of communal feasting, in marked contrast to the information provided by administrative texts about the king's table and offerings to the gods. Did these products not appear in the administrative records because they were so very common and grown privately at home? But people also baked their own bread and, nevertheless, bread is mentioned time and again in our sources. It is more likely, in my opinion, that fruits and vegetables, just like most milk products, pork, and poultry, were not made available by the authorities as food for normal people even on festive occasions because they were luxuries, reserved for the elite members of the society and never a regular element of everyday nutrition (Westenholz 1987: 92; Brunke forthcoming).

Further reading

For a detailed general account of the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur, with a focus on its administrative organization and the available documentation, see Sallaberger (1999). Detailed discussions of the various ingredients and food products encountered in this chapter can be found in Brunke (2011a). The cuisine of the subsequent Old Babylonian period is known through a series of procedural texts from the city of Larsa, offering specific cooking instructions but lacking quantities or ratios (which are given in the Ur III administrative documents); the standard work is Bottéro (1995)i, for an overview in English, see Bottéro (2004). A good general survey of food and drink in Babylonia is Reynolds (2007).

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CHAPTER 9

CUNEIFORM WRITING IN NEO-BABYLONIAN TEMPLE COMMUNITIES

MICHAEL JURSA

This chapter surveys the uses of writing in the ambit of Babylonian temple households of the first millennium BC. It discusses first the social and economic background, in particular in the light of recent research that argues against the application of the 'redistributive household model' to the temples of this period. Other topics include the structure, aim, and efficiency of temple bureaucracy, the question of the priests' literacy, the use of writing for private record-keeping in priestly households, the particular light that is shed on priests by a survey of their epistolographical customs, and the archival setting of the collections of literary material that have been recovered from Babylonian temples.

The main focus of the discussion lies on the 'long 6th century',—the period between the emergence of the Neo-Babylonian empire and the fall of Assyria (626 BC) and the 2nd year of Xerxes (484 BC), when, in the aftermath of a Babylonian rebellion against the Achaemenid king, Persian reprisals against the temples of northern Babylonia upset the social and economic fabric of the communities concerned. This period has left an exceptional wealth of written sources and is therefore much better understood than earlier and later periods of the first millennium BC. The chapter also engages with material from the final centuries of the first millennium BC. This period is of particular relevance for the present topic because at that time the use of cuneiform writing seems to have survived in temple contexts only.

The socio-economic background

First-millennium Babylonian temples (Figure 9.1) were complex economic entities—households, according to the usual model—with hundreds, occasionally even a few thousand dependants (see, e.g., Bongenaar 1997). As is expected in a pre-modern

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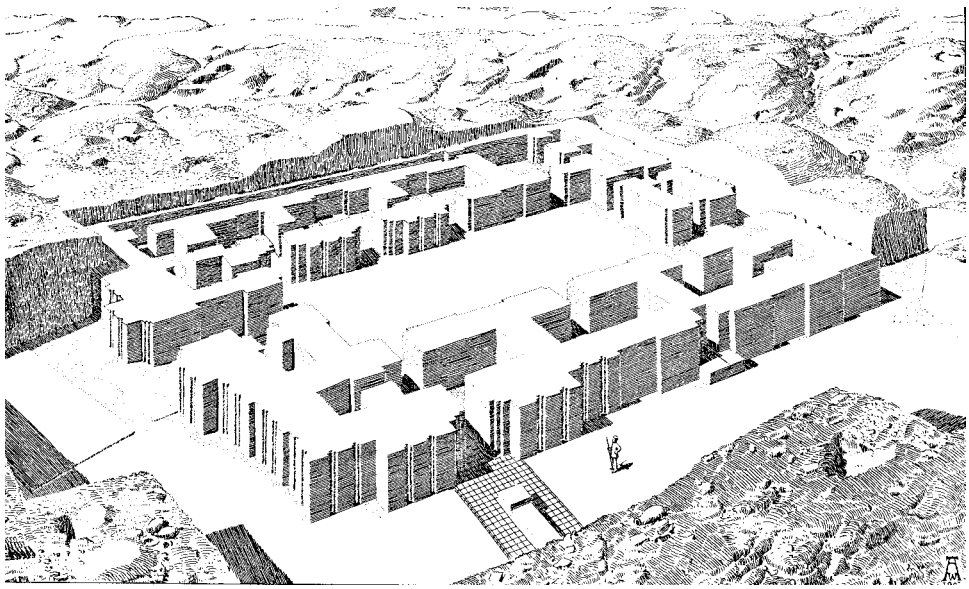

FIGURE 9.1 E-hursag-tilla, the temple of Ninurta at Babylon, after excavation and minor restoration. (Drawing reproduced from Koldewey 1911: 25 Abb. 25)

agrarian economy, activities in the primary sector of the economy—food production and generally the harvesting of natural resources—were a predominant concern of these institutions (Jursa 2005a). Temples owned huge rural estates as well as a substantial amount of land within the city walls. The majority of their rural holdings was concentrated around their home cities, but one also finds evidence for estates situated at a considerable distance from the urban centre.

After agriculture, animal husbandry was the temples' most important economic activity. Temple flocks roamed quite widely to find adequate grazing. Sheep owned by the Eanna temple from southern Uruk, for instance, could be found east of the Tigris, on the northeastern borders of Babylonia. The principal product of animal husbandry was wool, the raw material for Babylonia's textile 'industry'. Meat and milk products were of lesser importance. Especially in the south, where sheep breeding played a larger role overall for the institutional economy than in the north, wool could be used as a secondary means of payment. The second most important product of animal husbandry for the temples were young male lambs, the most common offering to the gods.

The temples' activities in the secondary sector of the economy—manufacturing and construction—were mostly focused on the cities. Temple craftsmen were provided with raw materials, or the means to acquire raw materials, and in return had to deliver the finished products. They normally worked in temple-owned workshops in the inner city, within the temple precinct. As for the tertiary sector of the economy, storage and the internal (re)distribution of goods were handled by temple personnel, as were internal administration and, to some extent, transport. For other services, including the distribution of

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temple products to the outside economy, the temples mostly relied on outsiders—that is, private contractors.

Among the temple personnel clear social distinctions can be observed. On the highest levels of this hierarchy one finds royal officials working as temple administrators. Other leading officials were recruited from the priestly families of the city. Temple prebends (priestly offices connected with certain income rights) constituted a vital economic link that bound the temple to the city and its elite. Also here, royal interference was noticeable: priests depended, at least in theory, on royal approval for their consecration (Waerzeggers and Jursa 2008), and the king could remove from office the high temple officials of priestly origin. Below the level of the prestigious priestly families, there was a stratum of ordinary craftsmen—smiths, weavers, potters, etc.—and menial workers, mostly unfree serfs (*širku*, literally 'oblate'), who were bound to the temple, but lived in families. The same is true for temple personnel living and working in the countryside: most of the temples' gardeners and ploughmen were serfs.

The model commonly used to describe the Mesopotamian temple economy is the *oikos* or household model that was first developed by Karl Bücher and adapted by Max Weber, Karl Polanyi, and others. According to this model, the dominant mode of exchange in temple households was redistribution. Temples are supposed to have supplied their dependants with the basic necessities of life. These temple dependants in their turn constituted the work force that produced these goods. Temple income—for example, agricultural produce or wool—was delivered to central storehouses in the city, from which daily or monthly rations were issued to the temple personnel. This implies a highly centralized, bureaucratic management of affairs, including agricultural production. Granted that certain commodities, such as metals, that were unavailable locally had to be brought in from the outside and were paid for with the institutions' surpluses, the usual view is that this was a system approaching a more or less closed circle. The institutional households are seen as ideally self-sufficient: the temple and its personnel consume what temple estates produce (e.g. Renger 2004; Postgate 1994: 109–154).

However, recent work on the largest groups of Babylonian temple texts, the archives of the 6th century BC from the Ebabbar in Sippar and the Eanna in Uruk, shows that the *oikos* model does not fit the evidence in several fundamental aspects (Kleber 2008; Jursa 2005a; Jursa 2010a: 469–753). We do not find an economic system that is essentially based on centralized redistribution. Far from being self-sufficient with respect to labour and the circulation of goods—even the most basic agricultural goods—the temple economy was dependent on exchange with the 'outside' economy. This need for interaction created a much more open economic system than the household model allows. This system was inextricably linked with the sector of the economy in which monetized exchange through markets was the dominant mode of exchange.

This 'openness' of the temple economy is apparent on several levels. 6th-century temple personnel were provided with regular payments in kind in the majority of cases, but these payments were not food rations, as the traditional interpretation suggests, but salaries in kind. They were consumed only in part as food: a substantial part was intended for exchange (Jursa 2008b). Money salaries often substituted such salaries paid in kind.

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In particular in Uruk in the first half of the 6th century BC, money salaries that were tied to the barley price were a normal aspect of the system of remuneration of temple dependants. The temple dependants were thus 'pushed' collectively into the money-based market by the temples.

Both of the well-known temple households demonstrably failed to produce sufficient quantities of certain basic commodities with their own resources, and compensated for this shortfall by purchasing what was needed. In Sippar in the north, the Ebabbar temple's principal weakness, for instance, was its lack of animals, especially sheep—a grave problem as the regular offerings to the gods, which could not be interrupted nor interfered with in any way, required a regular supply of large numbers of animals. Even more importantly, the temples suffered from a chronic lack of manpower. For building projects, large numbers of free labourers had to be hired by the temples and paid for in silver. The temples had to spend vast amounts of silver for this purpose. Such large-scale money transactions were made possible by the fact that temples compensated for their weaknesses by developing strengths in other economic areas. Eanna, for instance, engaged in the wool trade: its herds produced a considerable surplus which could be sold for silver, mostly to the palace and to wholesale traders. Ebabbar profited from its more intensive agrarian regime: it sold the better part of its date harvest, dates being the temple's principal agricultural product.

The 'prebendary' or priestly families who governed the temples jointly with royal officials have left a huge textual documentation of their own (Figure 9.2). Socially, the temple and its community were their main point of reference. This is apparent in marriage practices: group-specific 'endogamy'—intermarriage between prebendary families—was the rule. Economically, their temple offices supplied these families with a (comparatively) secure source of income (in kind, mostly). Such offices or prebends (and shares in prebendary income) were traded frequently. The need to organize the actual temple service gave rise to many different types of business arrangements between members of this group, their dependants and slaves, and sometimes also free craftsmen not attached to the temple establishment. The second pillar of the subsistence strategy of priests was land ownership: typically, priestly families owned one or two date groves in the vicinity of their cities, which were usually rented out. Economic activities outside these two spheres are comparatively rare and usually of minor importance. There is only limited evidence for social and economic mobility within this group. Most often this mobility took the form of impoverishment, but also occasional cases of social advancement can be detected in the sources (Jursa 2010a: 153–315).

The improved understanding of the structure of Babylonian temples in the context of the first-millennium economy should not lead to an anachronistic misunderstanding. A Babylonian temple was not a large, complex, and more or less self-sufficient household designed to maintain all those who worked within it, as the *oikos* model would have it, but neither was it a market- and profit-orientated enterprise with a rational management, nor was it an economic entity whose resources, including compelled labour, mostly benefited a small exploitative elite, the priests. A temple's principal *raison d'être* was quite simply to act as the economic support base for the cult of the gods. It would be

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FIGURE 9.2 Commemorative stela set up in honour of a priest by his son (BM 90834; King 1912: pl. XCII). (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website: http://tinyurl.com/4yxa739)

reductionistic to see this fact as a matter of mere religious or ideological superstructure hiding, or rationalizing, the 'hard facts' of social and economic life: inequality, hierarchies, political domination, and so forth. These 'hard facts' were shaped just as much *by* the 'superstructure,' not vice versa: the temples' entire economic structure was geared towards ensuring the upkeep of the demanding cycle of regular offerings to the gods. Temples were conceived of as the gods' earthly homes, and ensuring their correct management was one of the most important concerns of all royal and civic institutions. The

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huge effort and the substantial economic resources that were necessary for fulfilling the exigencies of religious worship in the context of the official temple cult were not simply offset by the *material* benefit the priests and the king (who were entitled to the gods' 'leftovers') reaped from it. Understanding the temples' economic activities is only possible when one realizes that, for all the superficial resemblance of the temple households to large estates geared towards commercial cash-crop production, the motivation guiding their economic management was religious: the chief concern was to satisfy the gods and the (divinely sanctioned) king.

It should be emphasized at this point that temples were subject to royal authority (see, e.g., Kleber 2008). The assumption, well entrenched in Assyriology since the 1920 at least, that internal politics in Mesopotamia received much of their dynamics from a polarization of power between the king and his establishment (the 'palace') on the one hand and the temples on the other is certainly incorrect in the case of Babylonia in the first millennium BC. The ability of temple households to act independently of the king was limited, and their resources were in any case inadequate for them to become a potentially important independent factor. The major fault line in the Neo-Babylonian state probably was elsewhere—viz. between the king on the one hand and provincial governors, especially those of tribal origin, on the other. Tribal chiefs, who had been integrated only superficially into the fabric of the new empire, commanded important resources that could challenge central government, as in the 9th, 8th, and 7th centuries BC (Jursa 2010b). Also the elites in the old Babylonian cities of the alluvium had a tradition of semi-independent political activity, which could pit cities against the king, or against each other (Barjamovic 2004). This tradition is even reflected in scholarship, where local traditions could be jealously guarded (see, e.g., Finkel 2000: 141 n. 11). It clearly nurtured the revolts against Xerxes in 484 BC and prompted the severe Persian reprisals against the cities of northern Babylonia (Waerzeggers 2003/04). For this tradition of urban independence, temples and the temple cults were an important factor on an ideological level, but not in terms of *Realpolitik*. The political power of the cities resided in their prosperity (and their demographic strength); in this respect the temple households were but one contributing factor, and not the most important one.

The economic behaviour of Babylonian priests has recently been reconsidered in light of the newly available sources from Borsippa (Jursa 2010a: 153–315; on the archives see Waerzeggers 2005). The range of economic choices open to priests was demonstrably restricted when compared to what is known about members of the urban elite who did not belong to the priesthood. Priests usually adhered to family traditions in their choice of occupation (assuming they even had a choice). Their main economic goal was the preservation of the 'paternal estate,' *bīt abi*, which was constitutive for their personal and collective sense of identity. In this context it seems that the 'prebends', which entitled the priests to an income related to their particular cultic duties, might have to be considered as much a potential encumbrance as a source of secure income, owing to the rigid scheme of service duties into which prebend owners were forced. Prebend ownership could be a considerable burden. The economic benefit that could be reaped from it may often have been limited in comparison to the social benefit of

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belonging to the priesthood. Many priests were wealthy, some were clearly poor, with household incomes barely above subsistence level, but overall the range of attested incomes is much narrower than that found outside the institutional realms. Especially in the case of priests not belonging to the so-called 'purveying professions'—that is, priests who were responsible for the preparation of the food offerings, such as prebendary bakers, brewers, or butchers—the comparatively limited range of economic activities (in the sense of property management and related business) was supplemented by concerns which rarely leave traces in the documentary record: working as they did as exorcists, medical practitioners, singers, and so forth both within the context of the official cult as well as outside of it, they needed to acquire, store, and pass on to their offspring, the necessary intellectual expertise and specialized knowledge.

Cuneiform writing was inextricably linked with the socio-economic setting described in the foregoing paragraphs. This is best seen in the documentation from the last centuries of the first millennium, when the use of the cuneiform script was restricted nearly exclusively to temple contexts (see Clancier in this volume). In the temples, and for members of temple households, cuneiform writing served three principal purposes: temple administration in all its aspects, the priests' private accounting and record-keeping, and transmission of traditional learning, in the first place for the purposes of the temple cult. Correspondingly, cuneiform tablets recovered from temple contexts are generally sorted into three different categories: 'administrative', 'private', and 'literary', the last category including school tablets. Differentiating texts along these general lines is a useful heuristic procedure especially because, for the bulk of the textual material from first-millennium Babylonia, excavation records are missing or are at least inadequate to establish find spots, so that the sorting of tablets into archives or 'libraries' has to be done on the basis of internal evidence. However, such a labelling risks misrepresenting ancient reality: tablets of different categories were often written, used, and stored by the same persons in the same place. After a brief discussion of scribal training and literacy, the following pages therefore review these categories one by one, but also discuss case studies that illustrate the intermingling of text categories.

Scribal training and literacy

Neo-Babylonian 'school texts', texts documenting scribal training, have been studied by Petra Gesche (2000). She distinguishes several levels of training, each characterized by particular text types. In 'first grade', students learned the fundamentals of the writing system mostly by copying extracts from lexical lists; in 'second grade', the focus was on literary and again lexical material, of which extracts were copied onto tablets of a distinct shape. Other exercises involved the copying of lists of personal names and place names, extracts from contracts and letters, lists of verbal forms, and proverbs. The literary material used includes compositions conveying central concepts and values of Babylonian culture, such as the Epic of Creation (*Enūma Eliš*) or the Description of

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Babylon (*Tintir = Babylon*). Some of these texts bear colophons stating that the tablets in question were dedicated to Nabu, the god of writing, and placed in the temple to invoke the god's blessing for the apprentice scribe, and in fact many school tablets have been recovered from the Temple of Nabu-ša-hare in Babylon, but also from Ebabbar in Sippar. At least one well-known priest and businessman from Sippar is also known through a school tablet which he, as apprentice scribe, dedicated to Nabu in Ebabbar (Gesche 2000: 476–477). In a final step ('third grade'), (some) scribes were trained as specialists in administration and accounting, or focused on scholarly or religious uses of writing with a view towards working as, for example, exorcists, diviners, or astronomers.

The fact that school tablets were recovered from temples does not prove that there were temple schools training apprentice priests in the art of writing. The existence of training institutions connected with the temples cannot be categorically excluded, but the available evidence points to training within the family as the usual way in which aspiring scribes acquired the skills necessary for their profession (see below 'The tablets of the Šangu-Šamaš family from Sippar').

Among temple personnel, literacy was not limited by any means to a restricted group of professional administrators and clerks who dealt with the administration of the temple household, and to a few scholars among the priesthood: it is virtually certain that many, if not most, of the first-millennium priests could read and write: literacy was widespread among this social group. This can be demonstrated best by a survey of the private archives of priestly families. In twenty-four of the thirty-five well-preserved archives of this type (listed in Jursa 2005b) that are known today, at least one of the chief protagonists is explicitly attested as a scribe. In two more cases (the Borsippean archives Ilia D and Ibnaya A) literacy can be assumed as a given since archive owners held the office of city governor of Borsippa, which must have required at least a rudimentary knowledge of the cuneiform script. In the case of six of these archives (from Babylon: Bel-ušallim and Mušezib; from Nippur: Absummu; from Sippar: Šangu-Šamaš A; and from Uruk: Reš B and Ekur-zakir), legal and administrative documents have been found intermingled with 'libraries'—that is, collections of scientific and literary material serving the professional needs of the archive-owning families. Since writing skills were transmitted within the family, this sample suggests that more than two-thirds of the prebendary families were literate—there is no reason to assume that the priestly families whose archives happen to have been preserved were in any way atypical. In actual fact literacy was probably even more widespread among priests than the survey of priestly archives suggests. The reason for this is that literate archive owners are comparatively unlikely to appear as scribes in their own archives. In many types of transactions, protagonists could not act as scribes; property deeds in particular had to be written by professional notaries because they were officially registered for taxation purposes (Baker and Wunsch 2001; Jursa 2008a). All owners of 'ritualist' prebends, singers, temple-enterers, exorcists, and so forth, must have been able to read and write, but literacy among the priesthood was certainly not limited to this group: the actual evidence for literate priests mostly comes from archives owned by prebendaries belonging to the so-called 'purveying' or artisanal trades engaged with the preparation of the daily offerings of the gods: oxherds, brewers and bakers, reed-workers, and so on.

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Private archives of priestly families

As stated above, today thirty-five private archives of priests (or prebend owners) which are reasonably well preserved are known. They come from the most important old cities of Babylonia: from north to south, Sippar, Babylon, Borsippa, Dilbat, Nippur, Uruk, Larsa, and Ur. All but a few exceptions date to the 'long 6th century', *c.* 626 BC–484 BC. The largest of these text groups, from Borsippa, Babylon, and Sippar, number between two hundred and four hundred tablets. The composition of these archives is not fundamentally different from that of the archives of families without a priestly background: property and family documents (title deeds for urban and rural real estate and temple prebends, marriage contracts, dowry lists, etc.) form the core of the archives (Figure 9.3). They are supplemented by more ephemeral records such as rental contracts, debt notes, receipts, and administrative notes, which document the day-to-day activities of the archive owners: management of the family property, including the organization of priestly service. The evidence for an active engagement of priests in commerce, tax

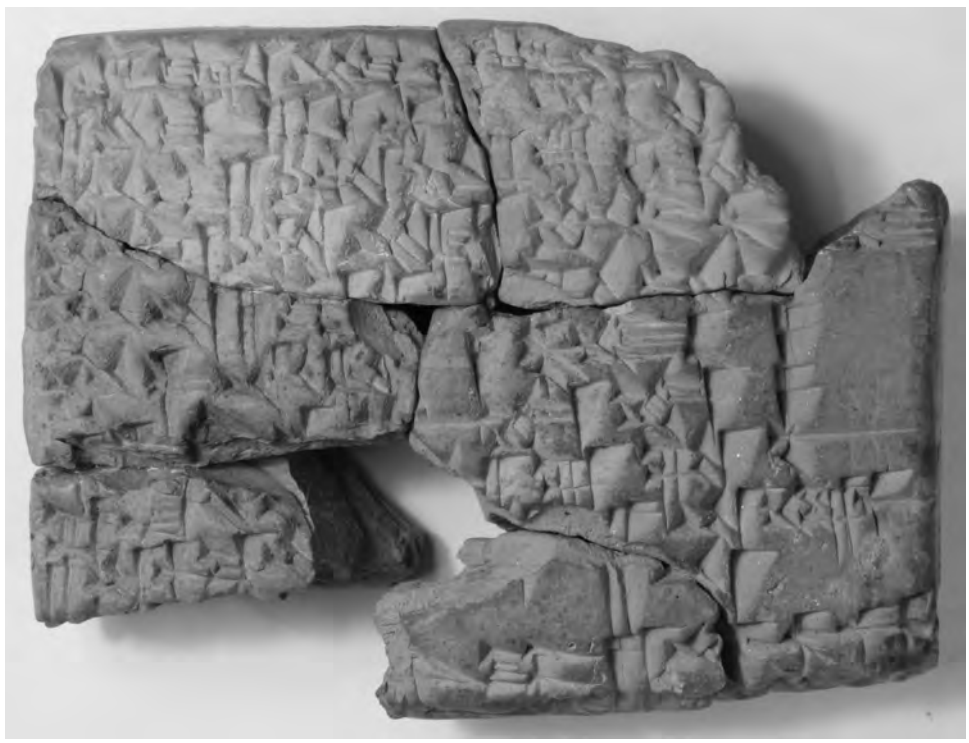

FIGURE 9.3 Student's copy of a legal document, referring to a temple office (BM 42425+; Jursa 1999: 181–182). It is the work of an inexperienced scibe: the handwriting is irregular and many characters are oddly formed. (Photo by Frans van Koppen. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

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farming, and other typical 'entrepreneurial' activities is slight and limited to a few atypical individuals: economically, priests were characterized by a 'rentier' mentality. The majority of the recovered archives is 'dead' or at least 'inactive' in the sense that they had been deposited by their owners after removal of the most important documents that were of immediate concern.

Physically, the archives of priests were kept either in their own houses outside the temple complex (as is the case, for instance, with the excavated priestly archives from Uruk, see Jursa 2005b: 146–149), or within the temple complex, in storage sheds (*šutummu*) or similar installations owned by the families and used for the purposes of their business with the temple (Joannès 1989: 125–12 6). It is therefore understandable that frequently private archives found by clandestine excavators are mixed up with institutional texts from temple archives.

Letters are a particularly important source of information on writing habits in a period in which, supposedly, the use of the cuneiform script and of the Babylonian language itself were increasingly supplemented, and, according to some authors, even supplanted, by the alphabet and Aramaic. Since the use of writing for formal legal documents (which make up the bulk of private archives) and for administrative purposes was subject to more rigorous reglementation and hence was more conservative than informal epistolary communication, letters are the closest we can get to everyday speech. About 1700 Babylonian letters are known today from the 6th century BC and later periods. Of these, the majority, perhaps 1300, come from institutional archives and concern matters of temple administration. The remaining 400 are private letters, of which about half come from the archives of priests. The latest known private letter dates to the middle of the 2nd century BC (Walker 1972: no. 72). These texts are witness to the continuing use of Babylonian (and cuneiform writing) for everyday communication at least until the eve of the Parthian conquest. The particular linguistic development of Babylonian reflected in these letters would be hard to explain if it were not the result of change in a living, spoken language (Hackl 2007: 149–150; in press). A small number of letters of priests and scribes dating to the sixth and early fourth centuries stand out for the literary language and recherché orthography with which their learned authors convey quite mundane messages (e.g. Frahm and Jursa in press: nos. 49 and 155). The introduction of one of these letters (Frahm and Jursa in press: no. 49, 6th century BC) reads as follows: 'to PN, <my> brother ... who grants protection and holds the stylus, whose words (literally, 'lips') are chosen, the wise one....' The wording used here draws on the formulary repertoire of Akkadian hymnology: this is a good illustration of how even in the late period one sphere of the use of written culture could influence another, even though the latter was normally not only entirely distinct, but also in much closer contact with daily speech.

Temple administration

This aspect of the use of writing in the ambit of the temples is best studied on the basis of the two large 6th-century temple archives, Ebabbar of Sippar and Eanna of Uruk. To a lesser extent one can draw on material from the 4th- and 3rd-century archive of Esangila,

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the main temple of Babylon, and on smaller text groups from a number of other temples.

The Ebabbar archive from Sippar in the north of Babylonia is the largest archive of cuneiform texts known today. It is to be divided into two sub-groups. The chronological range of the early Ebabbar archive of about five thousand tablets stretches from the reign of Kandalanu to roughly the middle of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (roughly 635–580 BC). The larger 'later' Ebabbar archive (25,000–30,000 tablets) follows the earlier archive after a short interval with only sketchy documentation; it breaks off in the 2nd year of Xerxes (484 BC). The archive as recovered was deposited at that time, presumably after the most important files and single documents had been removed. This almost certainly happened at the instigation of the Persian rulers, who instituted administrative reforms, exchanged key personnel, and possibly even (briefly) brought cultic activity to a halt after crushing the Babylonian revolts of 484 BC (Bongenaar 1997; Waerzeggers 2003/04; Jursa 2004a: 193). The archive consists of vast numbers of receipts, lists, and administrative notes documenting the flow of goods through the temple storehouses and monitoring the assignment of labour and resources. Summary accounts, ledgers, and similar texts are represented less frequently, and there is also only a comparatively small number of legal documents (Bongenaar 1997; Jursa 2005b: 118–120).

The archive of the Ištar temple Eanna in Uruk is the second largest archive from our period: currently about 8,000 generally well-preserved tablets are available, as well as a large number of small fragments. The temporal range of the archive extends from the final years of Assyrian rule and the accession of Nabopolassar to the 2nd year of Darius (r. *c.* 635–520/519 BC). Then the administration of Eanna underwent a major restructuring; archival practices were perhaps reformed. This led to a sifting of the available documentation and to the deposition of a large body of documents that had probably lost most, if not all, of their immediate relevance for the newly appointed temple administrators. It is this deposited, inactive archive that accounts for most of the tablets found by the clandestine diggers and the German excavators. Eanna continued to function after the second year of Darius, for a few texts dating to later years of this king's reign have been found. The latest document of this small group is from the 29th year of Darius (493/492 BC). The Eanna archive as recovered is thus made up of discarded material. This does not mean it is entirely ephemeral; in fact, the opposite is the case. While the text types represented in it are in principle the same as can be found in the Ebabbar archive, their relative weight is different: Eanna texts contain a much larger share of contracts and other legal material than the Ebabbar archive. On the other hand, Eanna lacks some of the wealth of administrative material that characterizes the Ebabbar archive. For this reason it is harder to reconstruct the day-to-day working of the temple household than in the case of Ebabbar (Kleber 2008: 3–4; Jursa 2005b: 138–139).

When confronted with a vast archive of administrative records such as the Ebabbar archive, the first intuitive assumption is to take these texts as documents of a complex bureaucracy which kept a large household under tight control. This initial impression is misleading. The general purpose of an administrative system such as that of Ebabbar

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(or Eanna, for that matter) is not self-evident; the 'style' of Mesopotamian institutional bureaucracies and their 'reach' varied widely in different regions and periods (Postgate 2001). The Neo-Babylonian temple administrations turn out to be examples of a system of rather restricted reach (Jursa 2004a). Tight bureaucratic control and direct institutional supervision was to a large extent limited to the temples' urban workshops and the major storage facilities. This administrative monitoring generated the bulk of the records (receipts and lists, mostly) found in the archives. The temples' control over their non-urban economic activities, including the crucial productive sectors of the temple economy, agriculture and animal husbandry, was much looser. Temple administrators limited themselves to setting goals for production and monitoring the income that accrued to the temple. To establish the obligations and liabilities of producers, contracts with them were drawn up by the temple administration. There was an increasing trend to farm out to private entrepreneurs the management of those branches of the temple economy that were difficult to supervise, especially agriculture and animal husbandry. This facilitated the task of the temple administrations even more: instead of assessing the productivity of many individual farmers or shepherds, they could restrict themselves to supervising a very limited number of businessmen who oversaw the day-to-day running of entire productive sectors of the temple households.

The great majority of the material consists of primary records—texts not based on other written sources—which constitute the first record of a transaction. Secondary records that were compiled on the basis of primary records are much less frequent, but they are of course known: summaries of deliveries from certain estates, or yearly settlement of accounts with rent or tithe farmers, and the like. The *raison d'être* of all this documentation is to fulfil a 'police function', to use a term coined by the classicist Moses Finley (1987: 33; see Jursa 2004a: 146): its principal purpose was to allow the temple administrators to ascertain whether producers had met their obligations, whether raw material issued to craftsmen corresponded to the finished products that were delivered, whether prebendaries delivered the food offerings in time and in the prescribed quantities, and so forth. Overall the temple administrations were probably efficient enough to fulfil this task in a satisfactory manner, although one should note that occasionally accounting was done quite carelessly, producing numerous false results (see, e.g., Driel and Nemet-Nejat 1994). However, it has been claimed for other periods that institutional accounting, rather than being an instrument of control, essentially was a planning instrument in that it was geared towards producing prognostications for the future rather than mere assessments of past achievements (or lack thereof) (e.g. Selz 1999; Steinkeller 2004). This was not the case in the Neo-Babylonian period for two principal reasons.

First, the type of data that were collected by temple administrators, and the specific way in which they were collected, would seem to preclude that the system was intended to furnish the chief temple officials with a complete overview of their institution's economic performance, or even that of certain of its sectors only. Information was gathered on waxed wooden writing boards. These ledgers, which must have been the most important single document type for temple administrators, are lost, but the designations of

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many of them are known (Jursa 2004a: 170–178). On the basis of these designations one can show, first, that the information collected on these writing boards was incomplete (certain types of income and expenditure were not included; the costs of agricultural production were not centrally accounted for, for instance), and second, that the main organizational principle of these ledgers was to focus on the legal/administrative background of the transactions accounted for rather than on the commodities involved: there were ledgers for different *types* of agricultural income (rents, tithes, gifts, etc.), for instance, but no summarizing ledger for barley and dates. With this type of information gathering, it was impossible to establish the full picture for a temple's income and expenditures.

Second, whenever temple administrations made prognostications and established future obligations, they relied primarily on rules of thumb rather than on a 'rational' analysis of available data (see Jursa 2004a: 180–184). There were standard procedures for estimating the return of arable farming or date gardening, or the growth of flocks of sheep or birds or herds of cattle. These basic arithmetic models involved a large degree of simplification and various trade-offs. Bird-breeding contracts for instance make no allowance for losses, but compensate for this by postulating rather low reproduction rates. Some lease contracts prescribe very high ploughing obligations for individual plough teams, but offset this by postulating yields that were sub-average. Administrative practice of this kind was informed by practical experience, but not by systematic bureaucratic gathering of information. The administrators' wishful thinking frequently had an important role to play as well—rather than shaping administrative practice to conform to reality, they presented reality in a form which fitted administrative needs. Independent entrepreneurs working for the temples were frequently confronted with such practices: having been given impossibly high targets to meet when undertaking to run certain of the temples' businesses, their dealings with the institutions were fraught with difficulty from the outset. Some of them simply failed, others attempted to cheat the temples, and yet others apparently relied on the backing of the king to continue their business dealings with the temples even though their output fell short by a wide margin of what they were contractually supposed to produce (see, e.g., Driel 1993: 223–224; Jursa 1995: 102–106; 2004b).

It can be concluded from these observations that Neo-Babylonian temple bureaucracies would have been of limited use as a tool for rational cost control and future planning. Information was never gathered with the intention to achieve a comprehensive overview of the temples' economy. It was intended to allow an efficient control over the performance of individuals (be they members of a temple household who were under obligation to the temple for this reason, or be they outsiders)—independent entrepreneurs, for instance—who had entered into a contractual relationship with the temple for business purposes. Only this 'police function' could be fulfilled more or less efficiently.

While the purpose and efficiency of the administrative system governing Neo-Babylonian temples have been discussed in respect of the specialized literature, a related question remains to be investigated in depth: the exact nature of temple officialdom. The lack of existing work is unfortunate since Babylonian sources would allow us to

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systematically research whether there are empirical foundations for the claim of a shift towards more 'rational' forms of bureaucracy in the wider context of Axial Age transformations postulated by cultural theorists like S.N. Eisenstadt (1986; 1999; see Schloen 2001: 52; Michalowski 2005). Also, there has been no attempt to study Babylonian bureaucrats as a group sharing a certain type (or types) of personal and collective sense of identity (for these terms see, e.g., Assmann 1999: 130–144; Bourdieu 1997: 107; Greenblatt 1980).

We are well informed about the origin and social background of officials: prosopography allows us to distinguish temple officials coming from priestly families—that is, from a background in the urban elite which maintained traditionally close ties with the local temples—and officials whose primary loyalty lay with the king, who were courtiers or in any case had their origin in the palace establishment rather than in the urban bourgeoisie from which the priests were normally recruited. However, the administrative texts and legal documents from the temple archives give no indication as to how the diverse social origin and background of officials influenced their activity and shaped their relationship with the institution in which they served. For a better understanding of this issue one has to turn to the letters written by these officials. Letters found in temple archives typically focus on the exceptional, on problems: this makes them a rich (if as yet severely under-exploited) source of information on the 'deep structure' of temple administrations which is simply inaccessible through the means of the rest of the documentation.

The letters contain valuable references to general rules of 'good administrative practice' as demanded by the king, and thus to a certain degree of standardization, of rationalization: for example, 'by royal order, no one is allowed to accept gifts' (Keiser 1918: no. 73), or 'by royal order, whoever approaches us with a legal charge against someone else should also speak to the chief priest of the city' (royal judges to the chief priest of Sippar; Thompson 1906: no. 231). Breaches of such rules of conduct are reported, as in a remarkable letter in which an official who feels wronged threatens to break the rules himself: … '…illicit deductions have been made…send me five minas (2.5 kg) of silver…otherwise I will make such illicit deductions myself!' (Clay 1919: no. 166).

A dossier of letters from Uruk shows that, as might have been expected, there could be rivalries between high-ranking temple officials closely affiliated to the king and other high-ranking officials of priestly origin: at least one royal official felt he was badly treated by his colleagues while on detached duty, supervising a building site. He claims not to have received the support he was owed, whereas the 'bishop' (*šatammu*) of Uruk was hand-in-glove with his fellow priests and received preferential treatment when it came to the provisioning of workers under his supervision (Kleber 2008: 118–123). In most cases, however, the style of communication between temple officials was sober and to the point (the following is based on as yet unpublished research by the author). In their letters, officials make little recourse to 'personalized' argumentation, e.g., by phrasing an official request as a demand for a personal favour, for example. Rather, they appeal to 'good administrative practice' or to the common allegiance to the king or the temple. Frequently, they give no explanation for their demands at all, the underlying assumption being that an official was self-evidently compelled to

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follow a certain code of conduct. In exceptional cases, they also threaten their correspondents with secular and divine authority. In contrast to Babylonian officials from the second millennium BC, the 6th-century temple officials never include private messages or private requests in official missives. While in earlier periods official epistolography in essence uses the same rhetorical strategies as private correspondence, the likelihood of mistaking an official letter of the 6th century BC for a private letter is small. Such findings support the hypothesis of an increase in bureaucratic rationality, or perhaps better, administrative professionalism, in this period. Further research will refine these preliminary findings.

Libraries and other collections of literary material

The temples are commonly considered the centres of Babylonian learning. In particular, they were the institutions that allowed Babylonian literary culture to survive and indeed flourish in an age in which Babylonian as a vernacular was increasingly (but not entirely) supplanted by Aramaic and in which the political government was in the hands of non-Babylonian elites accustomed to other writing systems (Aramaic and Greek). Esangila, Marduk's temple in Babylon, for instance had more than a dozen astronomers on its pay roll in the 4th century. In this period Babylonian astronomy/astrology underwent the crucial transition from a paradigm centred on the interpretation of a traditional corpus of texts to a more mathematical mode in which rigorous observation of astronomical phenomena was increasingly paired with mathematical modelling for predictive purposes (see most recently Beaulieu 2006a; 2006b). The temples, and in particular Esangila, were the general setting for this fundamental epistemological shift.

In this light it may come as a surprise that identifiable temple libraries, in the sense of collections of non-archival tablets kept by a religious institution, are relatively rare. By far the best-preserved case is the large collection of literary and scholarly tablets recovered from a room in the section of Ebabbar dedicated to the consort of the sun-god, the goddess Aya, by Iraqi excavators in the 1980s (general information: Pedersén 1998: 194–197). The library contains many text types of obvious importance for religious practitioners: omen collections, prayers, incantations, and hymns, as well as copies of some of the most important myths and epics of Mesopotamian literature (including the *Epic of Creation*). Several scribes mentioned in the colophons of these texts can be identified with priests known from the administrative Ebabbar archive (Fadhil and Hilgert 2008; Schaudig 2009). Undoubtedly this was at least to some extent a 'reference' library for the priests of Ebabbar; the material cannot be associated with any single family. A similar collection of texts may have been kept in Eanna, but here the find circumstances are less well known (Pedersén 1998: 206). Also in Babylon,

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controlled excavations have recovered some literary texts from temples contexts (Pedersén 2005: 188–192, 228–247, 283–284).

The evidence for institutional tablet collections notwithstanding, most groups of literary tablets whose find spots or archival attributions are known come from private contexts. The tablets were found in private houses or in temples, but can nevertheless be linked with individual families. It seems that rather than relying on a single central tablet store in the temple, priestly families tended to keep literary material they needed in their own private collections. This is well illustrated by a recently published text from the Eanna archive, wherein a royal messenger enquires after 'stelae, (i.e.,) inscriptions of previous kings, that are deposited in Eanna'. The chief temple officials pass on the request to the college of priests: 'show to the royal messenger the stelae, (i.e.,) the inscriptions of previous kings, that you know. Show to the royal messenger everything that you know and can remember.' (Kleber 2008: 270–271). The enquiry clearly deals with copies of royal inscriptions, grants, and decrees. Had there been a temple library in which such texts were collected, or had they been easily accessible in any other way, the request to the college of priests would not have been made in such a manner. They were asked to show the messenger their own tablet collections.

The known tablet groups that belong here were already mentioned in 'Scribal training and literacy' above. The 4th-century library-cum-archive of the Ekur-zakir family from Uruk, with about 300 tablets, is the best-known case of a private tablet collection containing literary material as well as documents recovered from private houses (Oelsner 2000; Robson in this volume). An example of a 'private library' recovered from a temple context is furnished by the so-called Reš B tablet group, also from Uruk, which most likely belonged to a family of lamentation priests (Jursa 2005b: 140, 147 with references; see also Clancier in this volume). In other collections of this basic type, administrative and legal material outnumbers the literary texts and school texts (see, e.g., Pedersén 2005: 198–202, 247–272 (including school texts)). Tablet groups of this kind, which united documentary texts with scholarly and literary material including school texts, were probably the most common type of tablet collection kept by literate priestly families. Unfortunately the lack of usable archaeological information on the origin of most first-millennium tablets now in the major Western museums requires that ancient tablet groups be reconstructed primarily on the basis of internal evidence. Under such circumstances, a connection between private legal and administrative texts and non-archival material is always difficult to establish and will in many cases remain undetected. A good example is furnished by the huge collections of astronomical tablets from Babylon dating to the 4th and 3rd centuries that have come to the British Museum through undocumented excavations or the trade in antiquities. These texts were most likely found in the Esangila complex. They are usually seen as the remnant of a temple library. However, most astronomers and astrologers in Esangila seem to have been members of a single clan or family, the Mušezib family (Beaulieu 2006a: 19–20). The family has also left us a small archive of documents and administrative tablets as well as a number of literary and scholarly texts identifiable by their colophons as work of family members (see Jursa 2005b: 75; additional material has been identified by J. Hackl). In the light of comparable

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scholarly archives from Sippar, Nippur, and Uruk one might put forward the hypothesis that many more of the astronomical texts from Babylon (which mostly lack identifying colophons) are not from an institutional collection but actually belong to the Mušezib tablet group.

We conclude this chapter with a description of another tablet group that was reconstructed on the basis of internal evidence and which, although exceptional compared to the surviving record as understood today, is probably a rather typical product of the literary culture of Babylonia in the first millennium BC.

The tablets of the Šangu-Šamaš family from Sippar

The Šangu-Šamaš A archive from Sippar dates from the late 6th and early 5th centuries. It belonged to a family of priests who held prebends of different kinds in Ebabbar and who also worked as exorcists and medical practitioners. About two hundred legal and administrative texts and slightly fewer than one hundred magico-medical tablets are preserved (Finkel 2000; Jursa 1999; 2005b: 127–128). The tablets include an unusually high number of duplicate copies, many of which were written in inexperienced hands and contain a surprisingly large number of mistakes and unorthographic spellings. This is evidence of intermediate and advanced scribal training within the family: family members learning to write were given the task of copying documents from the family archive as well texts from the professional library.

The socio-economic position of the family can be circumscribed with comparatively great precision. The elder of the two brothers who are the archive's chief protagonists owned a temple-enterer's prebend in Ebabbar, the most prestigious priestly office Ebabbar could offer apart from the positions of the chief priest (*šangû*) and his 'second in command' (*ahu rabû*, literally 'elder brother'). Other priestly offices, such as that of prebendary brewer, baker, and butcher for Šamaš and of priest in some of the minor sanctuaries within the Ebabbar complex, contributed to the family income. A large part of the documentary archive deals with these priestly offices. In comparison, agriculture and estate management are of minor importance for the family. The two brothers owned just one garden, which was tied to the temple-enterer's prebend, and the younger brother occasionally engaged in some minor agricultural contracting. Otherwise the archive deals with financial transactions (generally on a rather modest scale) and with taxation-related issues. It is possible to estimate the income that accrued to the two households (or single two-family household) from the family's known sources of income as about ten to fifteen times the minimal subsistence requirement of this period. With an income of five to seven and half times the basic subsistence requirement for a nuclear household, the Šangu-Šamaš family would have to be situated at the lower end of the income scale for priests, which ranged roughly from mere subsistence incomes to incomes of thirty

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times the basic subsistence requirement, with a majority of households falling in the band of five to nine times basic subsistence (for the methodology employed here see Jursa 2010a: 296–305).

The very limited range of business interests reflected in the documentary part of the tablet collection is owed first and foremost to the exigencies of prebendary service, which must have been quite time-consuming—priests who were as engaged in the cult throughout the year as the two Šangu-Šamaš brothers cannot have had very many opportunities for more ambitious business dealings. Apart from the priestly offices, the two brothers' probable independent 'practice' as exorcists and healers will have taken up a considerable amount of time. The magico-medical archive contains a wide range of incantations, recipies, lists of materia medica, and similar texts intended for treating a wide range of maladies and afflictions by the means of *asûtu* (therapeutic prescriptions) and *āšipūtu* (magical prescriptions). There is no direct evidence for the economic benefits the family reaped from these activities, but we can be certain that this income did not raise the two brothers to a significantly higher income band than the one we have placed them in on the basis of the information furnished by the archive's legal documents. We know that the family owned not much real estate and only very few slaves (the best indications of wealth). It must be considered at best moderately prosperous. The 6th century BC was not a period in which scribes and doctors grew rich through their intellectual activities.

Conclusion

The preceding pages surveyed several different aspects of the use of cuneiform in the context of Babylonian temples. In sum, however, it is for two principal reasons that these institutions stand out among the manifold settings of cuneiform writing and culture. First, they have produced the richest documentation for Mesopotamian socio-economic history from the first millennium BC that is available today. Second, they assured the survival of cuneiform culture into the final centuries of the first millennium, and even at this late stage allowed it to make one of its most significant contributions to intellectual history in absolute, in the field of mathematical astronomy.

Further reading

Bongenaar (1997) remains the best survey of a Neo-Babylonian temple household and its administration. Jursa (2010a) offers a new view on the economic background. For private archives of priests, the future publication of about 2000 tablets from several interconnected Borsippean archives (see Waerzeggers 2005) will open up new avenues for research. For the time being, the most convenient comprehensive treatment of such an archive is Joannès (1989). Waerzeggers (2011) and Nielsen (2011) throw new light on the social structure of priestly families. For collections of literary texts, libraries, and related matters see Pedersén (1998;

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2005). For scholarship and institutionally backed research in the final centuries of the first millennium see Beaulieu (2006b).

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CHAPTER 10

FREEDOM IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN SOCIETIES

EVA VON DASSOW

Freedom, both the idea and the reality, has conventionally been denied to the ancient Near East. It was invented in Greece, according to the standard story of our past; it is a pillar of Western civilization that was originally erected in the confrontation pitting Greek self-government against Near Eastern imperialism. This conceptual opposition between Western autonomy and Oriental autocracy, first formulated by Greek authors in the 5th century BC, informs the modern historiography of the ancient world as well as the rhetoric of present-day politics. In the modern period, ironically, the shoe has generally been on the other foot, as Western (especially American) imperialism has repeatedly thwarted Middle Eastern autonomy. But the antinomy that equates freedom with the West, and slavery with the Orient, is a proposition founded on Graeco-Roman ideology rather than a theory predicated on historical inquiry. If we confront the ancient evidence without screening it through the Western ideology of Oriental despotism, we shall find that it fails to conform to the assumptions we have inherited.

The evidence for ancient Near Eastern concepts of freedom, and for the rights that were the real-world correlates of these concepts, is found in many kinds of sources: legal documents, treaties, collections of laws, proverbs, literary works, letters, even royal inscriptions, as well as in the lexica of ancient Near Eastern languages. For the most part, however, the evidence these sources provide on the topic is indirect. The literati of the ancient Near East wrote no treatises on politics or philosophy, or on any subject whatsoever, preferring other genres for conveying abstract concepts; they did not articulate their ideas in theoretical works like those we are accustomed to reading from the hands of Greek and Roman authors. Moreover, the types of source we do have presume exactly the background knowledge we seek: what are the underlying principles according to

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which society operates, which every member of that society knows, and which therefore never need be explicitly stated in writing? How freedom was conceptualized in the ancient Near East must be inferred from evidence that was not produced to address questions about such matters.

In the present chapter I formulate a theory of freedom in the ancient Near East, showing how it is instantiated through selected examples. These are drawn mainly from the second millennium, and from regions where Mesopotamian cuneiform was employed. The basic parameters of freedom and servitude remained largely constant from the third to the first millennium, and did not differ fundamentally among regions of the Near East. Over this long span of time, however, the ideal and the realities of freedom did undergo change. The compressed treatment offered here necessarily collapses history somewhat, for general propositions must be illustrated with examples deriving from specific moments, while historical developments cannot be treated adequately—or even at all. Nor can other major issues that are automatically raised by an inquiry about freedom, such as the definition of the state.

Democracy is not this chapter's subject. Political freedom is not synonymous with democracy; nor, it should be added, is democratic governance defined by practices like voting and holding elections. The fact that democratic political institutions existed throughout ancient Near Eastern history does not suffice to prove that concepts of political freedom also existed, and describing the former is not tantamount to characterizing the latter. The evidence, however, does suffice to reveal the lineaments of political liberty in theory as well as in practice. Collective governance enters the discussion inasmuch as participation in governing the polity was an aspect of freedom.

General propositions

During all periods of ancient Near Eastern history, the majority of the population of every community was free, not enslaved. How was freedom defined; what rights did free members of society have? What did freedom mean in relation to the state? What was the nature of one's liberty, when one was not the servant of another?

The idea of freedom cannot be dissociated from that of power. While in the negative sense freedom connotes the absence of encumbrance or constraint, in the positive sense it connotes the capacity to act, to exercise choice, to have power. Both senses were encompassed within the ancient Near Eastern concept of freedom, which was fundamental to the conceptualization of society and the state. The theory put forth here starts from the following set of propositions regarding the concepts that structured ancient Near Eastern societies:

1. Freedom, defined as having power over oneself and the capacity for independent action, was essential to membership in a community in its aspect as a polity. In

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other words, being the subject of a state required being free; membership in the polity was citizenship.

2. The rights and duties of subjects in relation to the state were graduated along the scale from unencumbered freedom, with attendant rights and duties, to full enslavement, with no duties to the state and minimal rights.
3. Freedom entailed political as well as legal rights, including, at the extreme, the right to withhold or grant allegiance.

None of these statements would appear terribly novel, were it not for their application to the ancient Orient. The idea that subjects of Near Eastern states were unfree by definition has held sway ever since Aeschylus and Herodotus constructed the opposition between 'slavery' under the rule of a monarch and 'freedom' under a system of collective self-government, identifying the former with the Persian Empire and the latter with Greek city-states (see, e.g., Hall 1989: esp. 93–100; Steiner 1994: chapter 4); that they were contrasting *political* subordination with *political* autonomy has been lost on many of their readers. Their characterization of the Persian king's subjects as slaves came to be generalized as a description of ancient Near Eastern social structure, and retrojected into remotest antiquity: the Oriental state was born totalitarian, and upon its birth the population automatically submitted, forming strata of servants and masters. The modern articulation of this idea was given classic form by Moses Finley in his article 'Between slavery and freedom' (1964). Finley argued that the concept of freedom did not exist in ancient Near Eastern society, which knew only gradations of status in a hierarchy of differing degrees of servitude; freedom was invented in the crucible of Greek poleis. That proposition has widely been adopted as axiomatic (see especially Raaflaub 2004; but cf. Vlassopoulos 2007: chapter 4).

It is true that in the ancient Near East—as in Greece and Rome—there were several grades of servitude, but it is not true that liberation from servitude could not mean freedom. That would have surprised the multitudes of Mesopotamian kings who sought political support by taking measures to guarantee or restore the freedom of their subjects (the ones from whom they wanted support, anyway), as well as many a king whose subjects felt free to liberate themselves from his rule. Rather, freedom was the basis and condition for participation in the polity.

People could become enslaved in various ways; the main routes were through capture in war or through indebtedness, and after that by being born in slavery (Westbrook 1995). In principle, the enslavement of free persons by whatever means was temporary. Redemption by kin, community, or the state was provided for in law (and often accomplished in practice), in order to return members of the community to freedom and thus to full participation as citizens; for only free men, not servants of other men, could be conscripted to work and to fight for the state. The threat of capture in war came frequently enough, and the threat of indebtedness was ever present. Borrowing against one's family property could lead to loss of rights to the property; the next step was borrowing against one's family, which could lead to loss of rights to family members, includ-

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ing oneself. But forced sale of family property as well as indentured servitude were reversible—at least in theory—and reversing both was repeatedly a royal policy objective. This was so because the state was ideally constituted of subjects who were economically self-sufficient and legally free.

That this was the operative theory of the relation between subject and state is evident from diverse types of sources, most of which are not ideologically explicit but which, taken together, yield a coherent picture. The sections that follow explore various aspects of the concept of freedom within the framework of the theory proposed.

One important aspect will perforce be neglected. Freedom in the ancient Near East was gendered: women's capacities and liberties were curtailed under the norms of their socio-legal dependence on men. The dimensions of women's freedom and the details of restrictions on it would require another chapter. Within the present chapter, the reader should understand that if men are referred to, it is because men are indeed the referent in the ancient sources that form the basis of discussion.

Societal values and political acts

The idea of freedom as liberation from constraint and oppression was regularly instantiated in the acts of kings, whose inscriptions employ the rhetoric of release and restoration. At issue in this context was the release of the people of the realm from encumbrance and subordination, principally the encumbrances of debt and of government imposts, but also, more generally, subjection to the illegitimate exercise of power. Not all debts were concerned, only those that were assumed for the purpose of ensuring subsistence, and that put rights to family property or the freedom of family members at risk. Release would result in restoring the people, and their property, to their original state prior to becoming encumbered or subjected. Thus a king would accomplish the restoration of his realm through liberating his people from debt, taxes, and wrongful domination.

Such restoration of right order was expressed in Akkadian by the word *mīšarum*, often paired with *kittum*, 'justice' (Sumerian níg-si-sá and níg-gi-na, respectively). The restoration of persons and property to their original status was denoted *andurārum* in Akkadian and ama(r)-gi_4, literally 'return to mother', in Sumerian; both terms acquired the connotations of 'emancipation', 'freedom'. Royal enactments of 'restoration' under these terms, promulgated in favour of entire communities, are known from the late third to the mid-first millennium, but are most prominently attested during the first half of the second millennium in Syria and Mesopotamia (Charpin 1987; 1990; Lion 1999; Villard 2007). The death of a king would occasion the enactment of restoration by his successor; a usurper or conqueror would also promulgate restoration upon seizing power, to satisfy his (new) constituency; and a king might repeat the act later in his reign, or enact it in favour of a particular population, presumably in response to political considerations. Creditors responded, of course, by developing legal devices to immunize their transactions from royal debt remission edicts.

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One of the earliest known instances of such a restoration edict is attested by the Reform Texts of Irikagina, ruler of Lagaš in the 24th century BC (Cooper 1986: 70–74). Irikagina states that he put an end to the exaction of taxes and excessive fees by various local authorities, as well as prohibiting other abuses of power. Meanwhile, he established remission (ama(r)-gi_4) of debts, in particular debts resulting from tax obligations, and even proclaimed amnesty for theft and murder. With his enactment of debt and tax amnesty, Irikagina vows to Ningirsu, chief god of Lagaš, that he will never subject the weak to the powerful. His rhetoric articulates a common model of kingship in which the king's role is to hold the nobility in check and champion the interests of the people (and the gods); this model was instantiated by many a subsequent Mesopotamian king.

When the polity looked outward towards other polities, the king's championship of his own community was emphasized. For example, Sargon of Akkad became king by usurping the throne of Kiš, his own city, and vanquishing Lugalzagesi, who ruled Uruk (24th century BC). In a later legend Sargon was said to have defeated Uruk and established the 'restoration' (*andurārum*) of the people of Kiš, breaking their shackles and removing their marks of slavery (*The Great Revolt against Naram-Sin*: Westenholz 1997: 242, ll. 18–20). The *andurārum* attributed to Sargon would have meant release not from servitude for debt but from captivity as Uruk's prisoners of war (Charpin 1997: 13–14); by extension, allowing for metaphoric use of the imagery of slavery, it would signify the liberation of Kiš from subjection to Uruk. Freedom from foreign or illegitimate rule is linked with debt remission not only through the concrete mechanism of enslavement but by analogic transformation of the basis for encumbrance, from indebtedness to political subordination: accepting the obligations that follow upon submission to a political authority is tantamount to assuming an obligation towards a creditor.

Inasmuch as duties to the state constituted subjection, release or exemption from such duties meant freedom. Thus a ruler could garner political support through reducing the duties imposed on his people, or exempting certain communities from specific duties; in the early first millennium it became standard for select cities to enjoy exempt status. Such policies, however, tended to shift the tax burden elsewhere: if, for example, the citizens of Babylon were freed from the obligation to perform labour service, the work of maintaining canals and building defensive walls and so on had to be done by someone else. One way that a king could obtain the labour he exempted his own people from contributing was to subjugate other cities and use their people as captive labour; this, too, was a regular practice. Accordingly, kings would advertise their effectiveness by stating that they had liberated people from subjection. They would do so using the Sumerian verb šu-bar, 'liberate', or Akkadian *wuššurum*, 'release', alongside ama(r)-gi_4 and *andurārum*.

The people liberated could be the king's own—that is, citizens of his own city or members of his own tribe, as in Sargon's establishing freedom for Kiš. They could also be the people of communities the king or his forebears had conquered and subjected; or they could be populations under the rule of another state, whom he 'liberated' through

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conquest. These options were exploited by Ur-Namma (r. 2112–2095 BC), who established a new kingdom with Ur as its capital and enlarged his realm to encompass lower Mesopotamia and adjacent territory. In the prologue to his Laws, wherewith he established justice (níg-si-sá), Ur-Namma proclaimed that he had 'liberated' (šu-bar) the Akkadians and foreigners in the land of Sumer and Akkad, and had moreover enacted the 'restoration' (ama-ar-gi$_4$) of several cities that had been under the rule of Anšan, a neighbouring kingdom in southwest Iran (Roth 1997: 15–17). Similar claims were made by later kings, and not necessarily in the context of conquest. For example, a hymn lauds an otherwise undistinguished king named Anam, who ruled Uruk *c.* 1800, for having liberated the people of Nippur from Uruk and released them to their own city (Falkenstein 1963: 80–82; ETCSL 2.7.1.1).

The theme that runs throughout these diverse instances is freedom from coercion and constraint, whether arising from economic, social, or political subjection. That freedom in this sense was highly valued is evident from the fact that it is said to be what the gods want for their people. When Anam freed the people of Nippur from servitude to Uruk, he acted to please Enlil, the patron god of Nippur. When Irikagina freed the people of Lagaš from debt, his policy was in accord with that of the god Ningirsu. This theme was elaborated by Gudea, another ruler of Lagaš (r. 22nd century BC), in a lengthy inscription describing his construction of the temple of Ningirsu. The temple was built by the people of Lagaš under conditions of ideal purity and sanctity that included—so Gudea says—a total lack of coercion: according to his inscription, 'no one was struck with whip or lash' (Edzard 1997: E3/1.1.7.StB, IV 10–11). Moreover, Gudea marked the construction of the temple by instituting not merely the remission of debts, but (temporary) social equality: 'the slave-woman became equal to her mistress, the slave walked at his master's side' (Edzard 1997: E3/1.1.7.StB, VII 31–33). Evidently, the theory was that since social inequality resulted from economic inequality, rectifying the one would remedy the other. And Gudea informs the god Ningirsu that he has done these things, because freedom from subjection is what the god wants.

The custom that a ruler should enact release from encumbrance, as part of his duty to do justice for his people and please the gods, was as deeply rooted in Syria as in Mesopotamia, and it had counterparts in Anatolia, too. The equivalent of *andurārum* in the Hurrian language was *kirenzi*; this was the pivotal term in the plot of a Hurrian poem titled (in antiquity) *The Song of Liberation*, preserved in a bilingual Hurro-Hittite edition, on which more is said below. In Hittite, exemption from duties to the state was expressed with the verb *arawahh-*, 'liberate' (from *arawa-*, 'free'), while *andurārum*, the restoration of persons or property to their status prior to encumbrance or subjection, was expressed with the verb *para tarna-*, 'release, send forth'. The two concepts may be conflated: when the Hittite king Hattusili I (r. 17th century BC) reports in the Hittite-language version of his Annals that he has liberated (*arawahh-*) the people of a conquered town from imposts and dedicated them to the sun-goddess, his act is denoted *andurārum* in the Akkadian version of the text, as if service to the goddess were the people's original condition (Imparati and Saporetti 1964: 52–53 (Hittite version); 79, 82 (Akkadian version)). Even if disingenuously employed, the governing

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principle was the idea of a divine requirement that those who rule protect and restore the liberty of those they rule.

Citizenship, rights, and duties

Freedom was conceptualized in positive terms as well. As stated above, individual freedom, defined by power over oneself and the capacity for independent action, was fundamental to citizenship—that is, membership in the community as a polity. Citizenship entailed service to the community, and the basis for the obligation to serve was identical to the basis for subsistence, namely property within the community (usually property in land). The enjoyment of freedom was contingent on economic facts, not because wealth was valued (though it was), nor because rights were a function of wealth (they were not), but simply because autarky was a necessary condition for autonomy. Accordingly, the self-sufficiency and concomitant freedom of a community's individual members was necessary to the community's own freedom, its political existence, and its capacity to act. Free men could be called to arms to defend the community—the state—that they constituted; unfree men could not, unless they fought in order to attain freedom. Ancient Near Eastern states, therefore, like many states in other times and places, were ready to grant the means of self-sufficiency to men who served them in war, or even to emancipate enslaved men in order that they might fight.

These principles underlie, and explain, the laws regulating the relation between service obligations and property that are enunciated in the Laws of Hammurabi, dating to the 18th century BC. The property with which the laws in question are concerned is that which is the basis for a man's obligation to serve the state—his family landholding (or homestead); the persons concerned are free subjects who owe service,—they are citizens of the state. The stipulations of these laws, together with their underlying rationale, may be summarized as follows.

1. A man's family landholding may not be alienated (Roth 1997: 88–89: §§36–39, 41), because that would void the basis for his citizenship and concomitant duty to the state. Only land that he has acquired by purchase may be alienated or bequeathed to a wife or daughter (through whom it would pass out of his patrimony); his family property together with the service obligation devolves upon his son(s) (Roth 1997: 86, §§28–29).
2. If a man abandons his property in order to evade his duty to serve, he shall lose that property (Roth 1997: 86–87, §30).
3. Conversely, if a man is taken captive while doing his military service, and in order to recover his freedom he must pay a ransom for which his own means do not suffice, then his city's temple must pay the ransom, or failing that, the state must pay the ransom to redeem him (Roth 1997: 87, §32). That the state would stand ready to redeem its prisoners of war is not surprising, but the way this law

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is formulated demonstrates rather clearly the state's interest in preserving the economic self-sufficiency as well as the legal freedom of its citizens.

The two primary duties a citizen owed the state were labour service and military service. As a Sumerian proverb puts it, 'a free-born man cannot avoid labour service' (Alster 1997: 147, no. 6.5). But the state could not require unlimited service. Enlil-bani, a 19th-century BC king of Isin, boasts to the god Enlil that he made his subjects serve only four days a month (Frayne 1990: E4.1.10.1001, VI 16–19). Were a ruler's demands for their labour excessive, his people would resist, or even revolt. In myth, this dynamic served as the premise for the creation of humanity: when the world was under construction, the labouring gods went on strike against the ruling gods, which prompted them to make humans as a self-reproducing work force, to relieve the gods of their toil (*Atram-hasis*; Foster 2005: 227–280). Real-life illustrations of the population's response to the state's labour requirements are rife in the detail-rich letters from the archives of 18th-century Mari (the correspondence of the governors of Qaṭṭunan yields several examples; see Birot 1993: 11–13, with nos. 37–39, 100, 102). When the state's requirements surpassed what it could reasonably demand of its subjects, the labour they owed had to be supplemented by that of hired help or servile personnel. While the labour of enslaved persons could be requisitioned, only free men could be conscripted to fight. This is illustrated by a letter to the king of Mari, which reports that, in preparation for a major campaign, Hammurabi of Babylon has decreed a general mobilization in his land, going so far as to liberate slaves so that they may be conscripted for military service (Charpin 1988: no. 363, ll. 9–15). Moreover, while labour could be hired, citizen volunteers, not mercenaries, must constitute the army; hence the Laws of Hammurabi prescribe the death penalty for the hiring of substitutes to perform military service (Roth 1997: 85–87, §§26, 33).

The rights of citizenship included rights to legal protection by the state. This meant not only access to courts and magistrates, up to the king himself, for resolution of disputes and satisfaction of claims. It meant that a citizen had the right to redemption by the state should he be taken captive in the line of duty (as stipulated in §32 of the Laws of Hammurabi mentioned above). He had the right to have his debts cancelled, should his legal freedom or his means of subsistence be compromised by debt, when the king issued a debt amnesty (as described in the previous section). Moreover, citizenship meant that the state did *not* have rights over one's person, family, or property. Thus, for example, an official informs the ruler of Mari that the two lads he wishes to acquire are not the progeny of palace slaves but the sons of free subjects (Akkadian *muškēnum*); were he to take possession of the boys, their father would appeal to the king (the king being Samsi-Addu, father of the ruler of Mari; for the letter in question, see Durand 1997–2000: no. 1026). In a broad sense, then, citizenship entailed rights to freedom and security in one's person and property, rights that—ideally—the state guaranteed. The state depended on its citizens for its maintenance and defence, therefore it depended on them having these rights, and performing the concomitant duties. Accordingly, the state undertook to preserve or restore the freedom and property rights of its citizens, individually and collectively.

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Citizenship also entailed the right—or obligation—to participate in governance of the community and to represent the community in its dealings with others. Citizens did so through assemblies, select groups of representatives or liaisons, and local leadership. This political dimension of citizenship is discussed in more specific terms below.

During the early second millennium, the key concept 'citizen,' 'free subject of the state,' was expressed in Akkadian by two different terms, one reflecting the perspective of the state and the other that of the people who constituted it. As subjects of the state, the citizenry was denoted *muškēnum* (often used as a singular collective), which literally means 'subject'. This term's complementary opposite was *ekallum*, 'palace' (or *šarrum*,'king'), denoting the ruling authority: *ekallum* plus *muškēnum* together encompassed the realm. As members of the community, or constituents of the polity, citizens were denoted *awīlum*, 'man.' The term *awīlum* meant 'man' in the simple sense of the word, but more than that it meant an autonomous man, one possessing authority over himself and his own domain, however small or great. Both terms contrast with *wardum*,'servant' or 'slave'; this term, which likewise did not designate an absolute category, indicated subordination relative to any superior (be the relation that of slave to master, official to king, or any human to god). Thus, all kings are *awīlû* (plural), and in relation to a king, any man not also king may be denoted *wardum*, 'servant', while the population of the king's realm is *muškēnum*, 'subject'. In relation to each other, however, all free subjects of the realm possessing unencumbered rights over their households were *awīlû*, 'men'.

As noted above, all free subjects owed labour service to the state. The general term for the duty they owed was *ilkum*, a noun derived from the verb *alākum*, 'to go, come', in Akkadian. This term was rendered into Hurrian by the derivationally equivalent noun *unušše*, from the Hurrian verb *un-*, 'to come, go'. Since the duty to serve was a defining characteristic of the free subject, this category of persons could be designated by a term referring to that duty, the way 'taxpayer' is used as an approximate synonym for 'citizen' in modern parlance. Such designations for the category termed *awīlum* (as citizen) or *muškēnum* (as subject) came into use in regions peripheral to Mesopotamia during the mid-to-late second millennium. In the northern Mesopotamian land of Arraphe, this category was termed *ālik ilki*,'doer of *ilku* (service)', whose Hurrian equivalent *unuššuhli* was used to denote the same category in the Syro-Anatolian kingdom of Alalakh. Both terms were synonymous with the Semitic word *hupšu*, which was the most widely used term for free, service-obligated subjects in this period. The factitive verb derived from the root of *hupšu* meant 'to free', and derivatives of this word came to mean 'free, freedom' in Hebrew. In an apparent paradox, however, the noun *hupšu* and the associated transitive verb also bore the connotation 'work' (Pardee 2002: nos. 19 and 27, with notes, on Ugaritic *ḫpṯ*). The paradox would be resolved through observing that free and slave were distinguished precisely on the criterion of the obligation for labour and military service: unfree men, being the servants of other men, could not be conscripted to serve the state. This categorical distinction is at issue in a legal document from Ugarit, a kingdom immediately south of the realm of Alalakh on the Mediterranean coast, dating to the 13th century BC.

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This document (Virolleaud 1957: no. 6), a tablet written in the local Ugaritic language and alphabetic cuneiform script, bears the seal of the king of Ugarit and was found in the archives of the royal palace. Excerpting the essential elements from an already laconic text, it states as follows: 'A has redeemed B, son of BB, and … (six members of B's family), for 100 (shekels) silver from the hand of the Beirutians. There is no *unušše*-duty upon them, until they return the money of A; then they return to their *unušše*-duty.' How the ransomed family fell into the hands of the Beirutians—debt servitude, capture on the high seas, a failed commercial venture, or some other misfortune—is a matter of speculation; it was of no relevance to this document and was therefore not mentioned. What was relevant was that their redemption by a third party meant they were now in his debt and in his service, therefore temporarily unfree, and as such they were not liable for duty to the state. That is why this tablet was sealed by the king and kept in the royal archives (rather than in the house of the creditor or, upon repayment, in the house of the redeemed family): the interests of the state, in the person of the king, were affected by the family's servitude. Only upon getting free of debt servitude could the family resume service to the state (*unušše*); for the subject's duty to the state was predicated on freedom.

That derivatives of the word *hupšu*, denoting the free subject obliged for duty, developed both the connotations 'to work' and 'to (be) free' is therefore entirely logical.

Class differentiation and gradations of freedom

Freedom, as manifest in the form of rights, duties, and prerogatives, was graduated along the scale of social rank. In all periods this was (and is) true to some degree, but at certain moments the principle was concretized in class structure or formalized in law.

One such moment is reflected by the sets of laws within the Laws of Hammurabi that make a categorical distinction between *awīlum* and *muškēnum*. As explained above, these two words both denote the citizen, *awīlum* from the standpoint of the citizenry and *muškēnum* from the standpoint of the ruling authority; neither term specified rank except insofar as *muškēnum* could not refer to a king, who was the *awīlum*, 'the man', par excellence. To put the matter another way: all free male citizens, heads of their own households, were *awīlû*; within this category, a king was a paramount *awīlum*, his rule of his own domain not being subject to the rule of a superordinate *awīlum* (leaving bonds of alliance and vassalage out of consideration). To the extent that a man was ruled by another man, he was *muškēnum*, 'subject,' or perhaps *wardum*, 'servant', though he be at the same time a free man—even a propertied, high-ranking free man. This is illustrated by a letter to Zimri-Lim, newly enthroned as king of Mari after a prolonged exile, from his supporter Ibal-Addu, evidently a sidelined descendant of the ruling house of Ašlakka. Ibal-Addu appealed to his royal patron to appoint him ruler of Ašlakka, declaring that,

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as he has not yet attained the throne of his father's house, 'I am a subject (*muškēnēku*)' (Kupper 1998: no. 77). Not being king equals being *muškēnum*, in the perspective Ibal-Addu adopts in this letter, though no doubt he was *awīlum* among his peers—and *bēlum*, 'lord,' to his inferiors—for only as ruler of Ašlakka would he possess his patrimony. The criterion is whether one exercises authority or is subordinate to it. Accordingly, in the usage of this period, every king was called *awīlum* of his realm: thus, Hammurabi was 'the man of Babylon', Zimri-Lim 'the man of Mari', and (for a time) Ibal-Addu became 'the man of Ašlakka'.

In most of the Laws of Hammurabi, as well as throughout the earlier Laws of Ešnunna, the terms *awīlum* and *muškēnum* are employed in the 'relative' sense, so that (excepting the king) any person referred to by one term could equally be referred to by the other (likewise in phrases constructed with either word: e.g., 'the slave of an *awīlum*' equals 'the slave of a *muškēnum*'; see Yaron 1988: 132–154). However, certain sets of laws discriminate between the two, stipulating that insult or injury to an *awīlum* incurs greater penalties, healing an *awīlum*'s afflictions earns greater fees, and divorce from an *awīlum* yields a larger settlement, than the injury, cure, or divorce of a *muškēnum* (Roth 1997: 107, §§139–140 and Roth 1997: 121–124, §§196–223; but not Roth 1997: 115, §§175–176, as explained by Yaron 1988: 134 and Kraus 1973: 106–107). Most striking, whereas personal injury is generally compensated by monetary penalties, injury perpetrated by one *awīlum* upon another is penalized by talio (punishment of injury by inflicting its like: Roth 1997: 121–122, §§196, 197, 200, 210), unless the injury was unintentional (Roth 1997: 122, §§206–207). Through the penalty of talio, exceptional in the context of Mesopotamian law up to that moment, intentional injury to an *awīlum* (or his wife or daughter; Roth 1997: 122, §210) is elevated from physical injury to a violation of honour. These laws thus effectively define the person of the *awīlum* as inviolable and, together with the rest of the laws discriminating between *awīlum* and *muškēnum*, they set apart *awīlum* as an absolute category, distinct from the category of 'subjects'.

What was the criterion on which *awīlum* was distinguished from *muškēnum*? It was not that the *awīlum* was a free man while the *muškēnum* was somehow only half-free, as is sometimes asserted; nor was the distinction predicated on wealth, or dependence on the palace, or similar criteria. Both *awīlum* and *muškēnum* were free, both could be wealthy or poor, and both could receive benefits from or provide services to the state; only the status of *awīlum* was clearly higher. The distinction turned instead on 'subjecthood': the *muškēnum* was subordinate to authority, while the *awīlum* exercised it. Persons qualified as *awīlum*, and not as *muškēnum*, were those possessing authority of the same kind as kings—that is, political authority. They were the polity's collective leadership, those who constituted the assembly and served as magistrates, those who made decisions on the community's behalf. The *awīlû*, in short, were the ruling class, peers of kings and sometimes kings themselves. Hammurabi's laws attempted to formalize this status by creating an *awīlum* class set apart from the general body of citizen-subjects, the *muškēnum*.

His innovation did not endure; outside of the Laws, it is hard to trace such a categorical distinction in the sources from the time of Hammurabi and his dynasty. In later

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periods the significations of both *awīlum* and *muškēnum* shifted downwards, *awīlum* losing its connotation of prestige and power, and *muškēnum* acquiring the connotation 'poor', and even 'mean, wretch' (the meaning it eventually carried into European languages, as in Italian *meschino*). But the process of class differentiation was repeated, with different results in different social and political environments.

In the Late Bronze Age (*c.* 1550–1200 BC), the growth of imperial states, in conjunction with the development of horse-drawn chariotry as a standard component of military forces, provided the conditions for reconfiguring the social order through class formation. A new elite class was formed, a class distinguished by the prerogative of fighting in the chariotry rather than on foot. This class was created in the Mittani Empire and its dependent kingdoms, then other realms followed suit. The new elite was designated by a new word, *maryanni*, a Hurrianized form of an Indo-Aryan word for 'man', which was borrowed for use as a designation for '(noble)man'; the *maryanni* class was also called by the Akkadian designation *rākib narkabti*, 'chariot-rider', in Arraphe, the easternmost kingdom in the Mittani Empire. The membership of the *maryanni* class was everywhere drawn from the existing local nobility, that is, families of high status who were socially proximate to the throne; the sons of such families became *maryanni* (or *rākib narkabti*), and were thereby elevated above the main body of free subjects. This body, it will be recalled, was denoted *hupšu* in this period, and it was also designated by terms referring to the labour service required of citizens. Members of the *maryanni* class, being exempted from the obligation for labour service, were categorically distinguished from the 'doers of *ilku*/*unušše*' (*ālik ilki* or *unuššuhli*). They may also have enjoyed immunity from antichretic servitude and distraint for debt, the perils that typically jeopardized personal and economic freedom. Thus the *maryanni* class enjoyed not only the privilege of fighting from chariots, but enhanced freedom. Accordingly, *maryanni* status was characterized in terms of being 'clear, free', and elevation to this status was expressed as 'release'.

At the other end of the scale, two additional classes were differentiated, at least in some parts of the Mittani Empire. One, denoted 'the poor', or 'the tenants', was apparently a class constituted of citizens who had lost rights to property in land but, retaining their freedom, still did military service (for which they might be rewarded with restoration of rights to land). The other, denoted by terms meaning literally 'saved', 'released', was a class whose membership consisted of occupational specialists and persons in the employ of individuals, temples, or the state. This class may have been formed in the first instance of persons 'saved', that is, redeemed, from debt servitude (or other kinds of bondage) by a redeemer who thereby became the patron, or employer, of the person released; this explanation would account for the fact that most members of the class practised specialized trades, for these were the debtors whose labour had the highest value. The members of the 'saved/released' class were also, evidently, released from regular labour service, instead of which they provided specialized labour to the state (as well as doing military service).

In states where all of the foregoing classes were distinguished, like Alalakh and Arraphe, the citizenry was thus classified into a fourfold set of categories differentiated by grades of freedom. The main category remained free subjects who owed

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labour and military service, from which body were distinguished those whose freedom was compromised by lack of property; those restored to freedom and released for specialized service; and the nobility, whose freedom was enhanced through exemptions and special rights or privileges. The last were, in a sense, peers of the crown, like the *awīlû* of the earlier period; the *maryanni* similarly formed a ruling class, though unlike the *awīlû* not a politically effective one. For in the new world order of the Late Bronze Age, the socio-political structure took predominantly hierarchical form, tending to eliminate political independence among those nearest the top.

Politics and the citizen

Participation in governance is the political aspect of freedom, in its positive sense. In ancient Near Eastern societies of every period, to a greater or lesser extent, citizens participated in governing their communities, thus in governing the state, or at least checking its power (Van de Mieroop 1999; Dercksen 2004; Fleming 2004; Barjamovic 2004). They did so through assemblies, whether formally constituted or ad hoc bodies, and through local representatives or leaders, chosen within the community. Under some circumstances the community could even choose a king, or choose whether to be ruled by which king, the exercise of which choice did not obviate local mechanisms of self-government. The word 'community' is used here in a broad political sense, without restriction of form or scale: the community-as-polity may be a city, tribe, or confederation thereof; it may be the state or a unit within a state.

Citizen assemblies took various forms, and were designated by various terms, in different types of sources and in different regions or periods. The general Akkadian term for assembly, *puhrum* (Sumerian ukkin), could denote an ad hoc gathering as well as a body with a standing membership. Bodies capable of assembly for the purpose of collective governance ranged from courts, presided over by judges or other local leaders, to 'the city' (Akkadian *ālum*), or even an entire land (*mātum*). Perhaps the most cross-culturally recognizable form of collective leadership was that instantiated by 'the elders' (Akkadian *šībūtum*) of a community (town or tribe). Though we generally lack information about how the body of 'elders' was constituted, or what exactly qualified a person for membership in this group as distinct from any broader 'assembly,' it would not be unwarranted to refer to the body so designated as the 'senate' (or *gerousia*, in a Hellenophone context).

These bodies of varying scale and type—senate, court, city, or tribal assembly—comprised all or a select group of the heads of free households forming the community. Their membership could thus be coextensive with the citizenry, limited to a quorum thereof, or limited to the leadership thereof, depending on the circumstances. Although some functions called for execution by the elite of a community, or by designated

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representatives, there was no obstacle in principle to participation by any citizen in the process of collective decision-making. Thus, when an assembly of the Hana people was called to consider a demand issued by the king, an ordinary citizen-subject (*muškēnum*) arose to address the assembly, and his proposal met with his fellow-citizens' assent (Durand 1988: 186–187 on no. 44).

Such collective-governance bodies could exercise a broad range of functions. What functions they did exercise seems to have varied widely from one region, culture, or period to another, but some indefinite proportion of this variation is a property of the sources that were produced and preserved, not necessarily a property of historical reality. Because legal proceedings tend to generate written records, the judicial function of such bodies is best attested. But assemblies and senates are also attested conducting their communities' political affairs, internal and external, and in some instances managing their economy as well. The best-known case is the city of Assur and its network of colonies during the early second millennium, for which the surviving documentation (mainly deriving from the colony at Kaneš in Anatolia) provides exceptional detail about the 'republican' structure of the polity and its economic management (Dercksen 2004). From roughly the same period, the epistolary archives of Mari yield abundant information on the political aspects of collective governance in the multitudinous communities and kingdoms whose affairs intersected with Mari (Fleming 2004).

Aside from having a role in decision-making, it was a general principle that citizens were obliged to answer for their community before other communities or before superordinate authority. Thus, for example, in the case that theft is committed within the community, and the thief is not caught, the city and the mayor must indemnify the victim (Laws of Hammurabi: Roth 1997: 85, §§23–24); in case a runaway is sought there and not found, the mayor and five elders or nobles must guarantee that they have not hidden the fugitive (Márquez Rowe 2001).

In the relationship between collective governance and kingship, the ultimate power that the community might exercise was the choice to accept or reject a monarch's rule. The normal character of this power is evident in letters to Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, that discuss whom the nobles (*awīlû*) of Ešnunna would choose for their next king: the possibility of their accepting either Zimri-Lim or Hammurabi of Babylon as their king has been nullified by their election of one of their own, a mere subject (*muškēnum*), to the kingship (Durand 1997–2000: no. 300, with Charpin 1988: no. 377). The normalcy of secession, too, is apparent from the loyalty oath the Hana people were to swear to Zimri-Lim, which includes the promise to report anyone who promotes secession, saying 'Zimri-Lim and his offspring shall not rule us' (Durand 1991: 50–52). The Hana, as mobile pastoralists, could retreat from the reach of the state into the steppe, but for communities lacking this option, monarchic rule could be rejected only through violence. In the 14th century BC, Rib-Hadda, ruler of Byblos, informs Pharaoh, his overlord, of secessionist plots fomented among Egypt's Canaanite vassal kingdoms: the self-made ruler of Amurru keeps urging various communities to 'Kill your prince! Then you will be like us and at peace' (Moran 1992: no. 74; similar statements recur in other letters of Rib-Hadda).

The tension between royal authority and participatory governance comes down to the simpler question of whether to rule oneself or be ruled by another. Accordingly, the story of Idrimi,

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a 15th-century BC king of Alalakh who was purportedly a younger son of the royal house of Aleppo, has its subject declare from exile in Emar, 'Whoever possesses his father's house is the foremost heir, and whoever does not is a slave to the citizens of Emar' (Longman 1997).

Liberation and theology

Several of the elements discussed in the foregoing sections come together in the Hurrian poem titled *The Song of Liberation* (Neu 1996; Wilhelm 2001). The key term in this poem is *kirenzi*, the Hurrian equivalent of Akkadian *andurārum*, and one of the key players is the senate (Hurrian *kivirra*, 'the elders'). *The Song of Liberation* dramatizes the divine demand to set a people free. It is a mytho-historical poem about Ebla, a formerly powerful city in Syria, and Igingalliš, a city Ebla had subjugated. Ebla, which is known through archaeological excavation, flourished in the early second millennium until it was destroyed towards the end of the 17th century BC, around the time when the Hittite king Hattusili I stopped over at Igingalliš, which lay somewhere north of Ebla, during his campaign in Syria (Imparati and Saporetti 1964: 44, 77). The Hurrian dialect of *The Song of Liberation* dates its composition to roughly the same period, and it may have been through Hattusili's campaigns in Syria that the poem first became known in Hatti. It was recorded in writing in a bilingual edition, Hurrian with a Hittite translation, two centuries later; fragments of several manuscripts of the bilingual text have been found in Hattusa, the Hittite capital.

The surviving fragments leave numerous gaps in the story, so it is not clear how the people of Igingalliš came to be subject to the Eblaites or what the basis was for their subjection (and the role of Pizigarra of Nineveh, who is introduced in the proemium, remains obscure). What is clear is that the gods have decided that Ebla must set the people of Igingalliš free. The storm god Teššub communicates the divine demand to Megi, king of Ebla, observing that the people of Igingalliš and their leader, Purra, have served nine kings already, and Megi is the tenth. Teššub promises to bless Ebla if it does effect the release (Hurrian *kirenzi*, Hittite *para tarnumar*) and threatens to annihilate the city if it does not let those people go. The god speaks in these terms:

> If you decree a release, the fate for Ebla is (this):
> You decree release, and I shall exalt your weapons (to have) godlike (force);
> your weapons will defeat (any) foe, and your fields will thrive gloriously.
>
> If you do not decree a release, the fate for Ebla is (this):
> On the seventh day I shall come to you,
> and I shall destroy the city of Ebla.
>
> I shall smash the city like a cup,
> I shall trample the acropolis in the dump,
> I shall crush the marketplace within it like a cup underfoot.
>
> (Otten and Rüster 1990: no. 19, I 20–30; author's translation)

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Megi reports Teššub's message to the senate of Ebla, where he meets opposition led by the orator Zazalla, who sarcastically inquires whether the god himself is in debt that he should require *kirenzi* (release). Zazalla argues that, should Teššub himself be in want, the senate would surely provide for him, but they will not release the people of Igingalliš, upon whose cooking and housekeeping services they depend. Though the end of the poem is missing, based on the preserved contents the destruction of Ebla must have ensued upon the senate's refusal of the god's demand.

The poem appears to explain the actual 17th-century BC destruction of Ebla in theological terms. The people of Igingalliš had lost their freedom to Ebla, and Ebla, having enjoyed their services for a good long time, was obliged to restore it. Of what exactly did the gods want the people of Igingalliš to be free? It was not debt servitude, evidently, for it affected not individuals but the entire community of Igingalliš, together with its leader, Purra, who is referred to as 'the captive'; this suggests rather that they were defeated and captured in war. Since the community as a whole, under its leader, was in captivity for generations, evidently the subjection Igingalliš suffered was its political subordination to Ebla's rule. The people's servitude was a corollary of their community's subjugation. In that case, the liberty the gods desired that the people of Igingalliš recover was not merely freedom from servitude but political autonomy. By refusing to grant them their liberty, the senate of Ebla violated the principle that the subjection of free men should not be permanent. Of course the gods decided to destroy Ebla then!

The themes of this poem, and often the very language in which they are developed, evoke immediate resonances in both biblical and Greek literature, such as Amos and Hesiod's parallel invocations of the wrath of God against rulers and ruling classes who oppress the people under their power. The pursuit of these comparanda, and of the lines of descent that link them with cuneiform literature, must be left for another occasion. The antithesis of domination versus freedom is problematized in various second-millennium texts, some of which have been mentioned here. Together with these sources, *The Song of Liberation*—despite its incomplete preservation—illuminates how ancient Near Eastern societies conceptualized the liberty that would ideally attach to the free subject of a free state. Such ideals were threatened by the imperialism and hierarchical organization that increasingly typified the Late Bronze Age; and perhaps that was why Hittite scribes were keen on recording and translating this Hurrian poem.

Conclusions

Ancient Near Eastern sources yield ample evidence that ideas of rights and liberty formed part of the conceptual architecture of society and the state long before theories of political and individual freedom emerged in Greece. While the sources disclose the practical dimensions and legal contours of socio-political organization in detail, theory tends to be subsumed by theology, leaving the concepts underlying both facts and theology to be inferred. This has left the way open to imposing an alien ideology on

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the evidence. Unburdened of that ideology, analysis of the sources indicates that freedom was fundamental to the ancient Near Eastern theory of society and the state. In this theory, as applied to the individual, social status and political subject-hood were functions not of servitude but of freedom. Political freedom consisted in the community's self-governance by its free members. How far the articulation of this theory was developed, proceeding as always upstream against trends towards concentration of power, can be glimpsed but dimly, but the core ideas were never wholly suppressed; for the autonomy of the community and the liberty of its individual members were values protected by divine sanction.[1]

Further reading

Charpin (1987; 1990; 2000) elucidates the terms *andurārum* and ama(r)-gi$_4$, the acts denoted by these terms, the application and effects of the acts, and their broader meaning. Freydank (1970) establishes that Hittite *para tarna-* is functionally equivalent to *andurārum*; Lion (1999) discusses the equivalence of Hurrian *kirenzi* with *andurārum*, and investigates instances of these acts in the mid-second millennium; and Villard (2007) examines the issuance of (*an*)*durāru* edicts under Neo-Assyrian rule. Otto (1998) discusses cognate acts, and the cognate Hebrew term *dərōr*, in the Hebrew Bible, with an account of the historical context of their literary deployment.

For the meaning and usage of the terms *awīlum* and *muškēnum*, the key arguments are developed by Yaron (1988), Kraus (1973; note Yaron's critique, 1988: 151–154), and Durand (1997–2000, passim; see esp. vol. 3, pp. 191–200). The analysis presented here differs in crucial respects from prevailing views, however, and will be treated more fully by the present author elsewhere. Honour as a category underlying the laws that make distinctions of status is discussed by Roth (1995–6). On the morphology of the plural of *awīlum*, Huehnergard (1987) has shown that this is one of a small class of Akkadian words having a plural in *-û*, oblique *-ê* (> *-āʾu, -āʾi*), rather than the standard masculine plural endings *-ū/ī*. Social class formation in and peripheral to the Mittani Empire is treated by Von Dassow (2008; 2009); the differing view of Márquez Rowe (2002) on the class denoted 'saved' is herein adopted.

Collective governance in Mesopotamia and vicinity has received fresh treatment in several works. Van de Mieroop (1999) presents an overview rich in detail and argumentation. For the early second millennium, in-depth treatments are offered by Fleming (2004), focusing on the world of Mari; Dercksen (2004), on Assur and its colonies; and Seri (2005, complemented and corrected by Charpin 2007), on Babylonia. Early first-millennium Mesopotamia is treated in detail by Barjamovic (2004).

The main edition of the Hurro-Hittite bilingual text of *The Song of Liberation* is by Neu (1996), whose reconstruction and interpretation are corrected by Wilhelm (2001). An English translation, following Neu's reconstruction, is given by Hoffner (1998: no. 18a). Further

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bibliography is found under individual tablets and fragments on the website of the Hethitologie Portal Mainz: www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/HPM/hethportlinks.html.

The ancient Greek construction of the dichotomy equating liberty with Greece and despotism with the Orient, in which Aeschylus and Herodotus took the lead, has been dissected by Hall (1989) and Steiner (1994: chapter 4). Vlassopoulos (2007: esp. chapter 4) analyses the modern development and application of this dichotomy, and proceeds to demolish it, pulling out its logical underpinnings as well as exposing its contradiction with the evidence (the reader should, however, beware of errors in his discussion of the ancient Near East). The only full-length work published to date on the topic of freedom in the ancient Near East (Snell 2001) does not go far beyond collecting pertinent vocabulary and instances of flight from bondage. Look for a fresh treatment soon from the hand of the present author.

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PART III

EXPERTS AND NOVICES

An influential model for describing the transition from novice to expert maps out five stages of skills acquisition, via advanced beginner status, competence, and proficiency (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980; Dreyfus 2004). The process entails several cognitive shifts, from strict adherence to rules and lack of independent discretion and judgement, to a deep and contextualized intuitive understanding that is heavily dependent on tacit (unverbalizable) knowledge (cf. Collins 1974: 167–168).

However, that move is not simply a matter of developing competence and confidence: although at one level learning often comprises a relationship between a single student and a single master, at another level it involves a much larger number of people. Through apprenticeship (whether formal or informal) one becomes part of a group, a 'community of practice', whose members collectively engage in a particular activity with shared interests and resources (Wenger 1998). At first the novice is metaphorically on the edge of the community, looking in. Through gains in competence, confidence, and social acceptance, the learner moves from the periphery towards the centre of the practice community, in due course becoming accepted as a fully fledged expert. In doing so, the novice inculcates not only the necessary technical skills but also the beliefs, standards, and behaviours of the group (Lave and Wenger 1991). Interestingly, ethnographic studies of contemporary communities of practice have consistently shown that this 'situated learning' is far more effective than traditional classroom education. The latter tends to place too much emphasis on rule-following and thus inhibits the development of expertise, as characterized by the Dreyfus model (e.g. Nunes, Dias, and Carraher 1993).

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In this view, cuneiform scribes and scholars most certainly formed communities of practice in which students and apprentices made the transition from novice (Akkadian *agašgû, šamallû, tarbûtu*, etc.) to expert (Akkadian *ummiānu*). In Chapter 11, Yoram Cohen and Sivan Kedar explore learner–teacher relationships in two different ways. The first half of the chapter focuses on two groups of novice diviners, trained in different traditions, in late second-millennium Emar. Induction into the discipline could also involve disciplining in another sense, as the sources suggest. The second half of the chapter examines common structures in Neo-Babylonian apprenticeship contracts to explore the three-way relationship between student, master, and family or owner. There is one learner group for whom it is difficult to imagine a community of practice, however: the crown prince, or trainee king, who by definition had no peer group—although at least he had a role model in the person of the ruling king. Silvie Zamazalová in Chapter 15 looks at the education given to crown princes in the Neo-Assyrian period and compares it with that provided for other members of the royal family.

Thus the journey from novice to expert was not simply a family affair: one teacher came from far afield to teach the diviners of Emar, Neo-Assyrian crown princes had non-royal tutors, Neo-Babylonian youths were sent away to be apprenticed—and in 17th-century Sippar a chief lamenter brought a peripatetic scribe to the house to educate his heir, the future Ur-Utu. As Michel Tanret shows in Chapter 13, Ur-Utu's inheritance of his father's title, wealth, and status did not bring unalloyed happiness. The role itself was stressful, while other family members were jealous of their father's perceived favouritism towards him.

Envy and rivalry also feature in the life stories of two other experts, both with positions at the royal court of Mari in the 1770s and 1760s BC. Asqudum, senior diviner and royal in-law, faced opposition and intrigue upon his appointment but was soon entrusted with many important affairs of state. In Chapter 12, Dominique Charpin traces Asqudum's career and asks whether it was his professional expertise or high social status that brought him such success. While Asqudum had the complete trust of his royal patron, the chief court musician Rišiya suffered a great deal of obstruction and criticism, both from within the royal family and without. Nele Ziegler uses Chapter 14 to present a case study of Rišiya's career and then to look at the education, employment, and social situations of other professional musicians.

Elsewhere in the book, Eckart Frahm considers the ideal of the learned king in Chapter 24, while in Chapter 4 Niek Veldhuis examines how scholarly training in cuneiform literacy entailed the acquisition of both technical skills and scribal identity. As Geert De Breucker shows in Chapter 30, the Hellenistic historian Berossos moved comfortably between two intellectual worlds, being just as adept in the conventions of Greek history as he was with its age-old Mesopotamian counterpart. Other literate communities of practice are explored by Michael Jursa, Steve Tinney, Mark Weeden, and Philippe Clancier in Chapters 9, 27, 28, and 35 respectively.

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Further reading

There is a big literature on scribal training in cuneiform, much of it cited frequently throughout this volume, although Petra Gesche's (2000) ground-breaking study of Neo-Babylonian elementary education deserves special mention as perhaps underrepresented here. The classic article on scribes as experts is Oppenheim (1975). Visicato (2000) studies scribes as a social and professional group over a 400-year period of the third millennium. Westbrook (2005) is an important study of the phenomenon of patronage in ancient Near Eastern societies, while Zaccagnini (1983) discusses the mobility of experts across the region. Wiggermann (2008) presents one particularly interesting case, of a Babylonian scholar in 14th-century Assur.

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CHAPTER 11

TEACHER–STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS: TWO CASE STUDIES

YORAM COHEN AND SIVAN KEDAR

As in many domains of cuneiform culture, our information about teacher–student and master–apprentice relationships is not as complete as we would wish. Direct evidence of the milieu in which teacher and student interacted, and documentation written by student or teacher attesting to their activities and interaction, are scarce and require careful assessment. As we shall see, circumstantial evidence, such as the archaeological settings of scribal schools or other pedagogical activities, which can shed light on the relations of those involved, is difficult to come by and is open to different interpretations. Therefore, although some aspects of instruction and education can be reconstructed, such as the curricula in scribal schools or the economic responsibilities underlying the training of apprentices, much remains unknown. What schoolhouses looked like; the social backgrounds of teachers and students, masters and apprentices; the existence of student dress-codes or uniforms; the performance of initiation rites or graduation ceremonies: all these can be quite thoroughly reconstructed from textual, visual, and material documentation from late medieval and Renaissance Europe, but are very difficult, if not impossible, to reveal satisfactorily in cuneiform culture. The few direct responses to the world of learning in the cuneiform record offer us no more than a glimpse into the life of students and teachers. Nonetheless, they show us that social contexts of learning and instruction can lead to expressions of the student body similar to those encountered in the schools of medieval and Renaissance Europe and elsewhere. Let us begin, therefore, with the 'School Dialogues', which have immediate appeal to our own sensibilities.

The 'School Dialogues' are short compositions in the Sumerian language which were written in the Old Babylonian period (during the first half of the second millennium BC) (Black et al. 2006: 277–280; Civil 1992; Kramer 1949; 1963: 229–248; Vanstiphout 1997). On account of the many surviving, albeit fragmentary, manuscripts, we can

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safely infer that they were part of the wider scribal school curriculum, which included sign-lists or lexical lists and various literary compositions, designed to instruct students in writing cuneiform script and the Sumerian language (Tinney 1999; Robson 2001). As such we can consider them as a direct product of the scribal schools. The 'Dialogues' humorously describe and reflect a school life in which conflicts typically arise between a student and his senior tutor, teacher, or father, or between fellow students themselves. The concerns are universal: student lateness, laziness, or failure to meet academic standards are the subjects of complaints by seniors, who not surprisingly demand punctuality and hard work. Here an advanced student addresses his younger companion:

> 'Well, fellow student, what shall we write today on the back of our tablet?' 'Today we will not even write a single word from our lesson!' 'But then surely the teacher will know and be angry with us because of you; what will we say to him? (*The senior student then brags of his superiority.*)…I have become excellent in the scribal art; I have fulfilled the function of "big brother" to perfection! You are slow of understanding and hard of hearing; you are but a novice in the school!…My father speaks Sumerian; I am the son of a scribe; but you are the son of a vile one, a barbarian; you cannot shape a tablet, nor knead an exercise tablet. You cannot even write your own name…'
>
> (*After a missing section, it appears that the teacher arrives and intervenes in the argument, apparently siding with the senior student.*)
>
> Teacher: 'Why do you act like this? Why do you push one another and hurl insults at one another? You raise a clamour in the school!…' (Vanstiphout 1997: 589–590)

This scene repeats itself, with variations, in other 'School Dialogues'. Because of such generic qualities, which are manifest in the portrayal of extreme situations for humorous or ironic effect, modern scholars have cautioned against treating these sources as reliable historical documents (Black et al. 2006: 276; George 2005). Consider this 'day in the life' of a young student, for instance:

> At school, the man on duty said 'Why are you late?' When he said that, I was scared and my heart pounded….I wrote my tablet and did my assignment, and then opened my mouth, without paying attention, and the man in charge of keeping silence said, 'Why did you open your mouth without my permission?' And he struck me….The doorman said, 'Why did you go out without my permission?' And he struck me. The man in charge of the water jars said, 'Why did you take [water] without my permission?' And he struck me. The Sumerian expert said, 'You spoke in Akkadian!' And he struck me. The master said, 'Your handwriting is not nice at all!' And he struck me. (*The master is finally appeased after receiving gifts from the student's parents at their house*). (After Civil 1992: 304; George 2005)

The description of the school populated by multiple personnel is almost certainly out of tune with the reality of the institution, which was much more modest, at least in the Old and Middle Babylonian periods. In spite of this exaggerated picture, such situations no doubt voice the interests and concerns of the collective student body. In this sense, the 'School Dialogues' are unique and important compositions because no reflective

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description is found of other occupations or their working environments. As such they may offer an indirect reflection of common interests and concerns in other educational domains—for instance, in the training of musicians or diviners.

We leave the 'School Dialogues' and turn now to documentary sources, mainly ephemeral documents such as apprenticeship contracts, business notes, and letters. As reflections of the routine lives of educators and their trainees these constitute the majority of our solid evidence for teacher–student relationships. We learn of fees paid to the teacher, the financial conditions and restraints imposed on the master and on the apprentice's parents or guardians, and the duration of tuition in various professions. Some cuneiform law collections, notably the Laws of Hammurabi (*c.* 1790 BC), add to our knowledge by defining the legal status of the apprentice handed over to his master. Complementary data, related to the upbringing and education of scribes, derives from the scribal endnotes, or colophons, appended to school texts and other scholarly materials such as omens or incantations. The colophons may reveal the student's status, his teacher, and his lineage.

In order to give the reader a coherent view of teacher–student relationships we offer two case studies based on these documentary sources. The first introduces the teachers and students of a scribal school at the city of Emar in ancient Syria (*c.* 1400–1175 BC). Thanks to multiple ephemeral documents and scribal colophons from the city, the social environment of a few scribes and their families can be reconstructed: we will see the conditions under which schooling was conducted, who the students and teachers were, and what the relationship between them was. The second case study presents a varied group of Neo- and Late Babylonian apprenticeship contracts (7th–3rd centuries BC). They allow us an understanding of the apprentice's gender and age, his social background, the length of his tuition, the salary of his master, and the trade being learned. The wide variety of trades, including bakery, textile production, leather-working, carpentry, pottery, seal-cutting, and cultic dancing, provide an important contribution to the history and spread of education beyond the confines of the narrow and elitist scribal circles.

Teachers and students at the scribal school of the city of Emar

The city of Emar, modern-day Tell Meskene, is situated on the west bank of the Euphrates, some 60 km down-river from the Turkish–Syrian border in Syria. Excavations of the city at Tell Meskene were initiated in the early 1970s in anticipation of the construction of the Tabqa Dam. This project threatened Tell Meskene and other archaeological sites along the banks of the Euphrates with rising water levels and the formation of an artificial lake. Following several seasons of extensive excavation at the site, the French expedition directed by Jean-Claude Margueron unearthed over 1000

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cuneiform clay tablets on the mound. This find is one of the most surprising and important discoveries of 20th-century Near Eastern archaeology: a small provincial city, which never had any significant power and was always under the control of much bigger political entities, yielded a large and varied quantity of textual materials which are on a par with those found in the major sites of the period, such as Ugarit and Hattusa (Beyer 1982; 2001; Huehnergard 1997; Margueron and Sigrist 1997).

The excavations at Tell Meskene were renewed in the late 1990s for a number of seasons by a Syrian–German team, who established that Emar was inhabited, perhaps even along roughly the same urban outlines, from the early second millennium until the 12th century BC, when it was destroyed. Habitation levels dating from the mid-third millennium have also been discovered, but the written records all date to the final centuries of the site's occupation.

The textual finds from Emar are of great value in two respects. First, they open a window to the social and religious world of West Semitic population groups in the western part of the ancient Near East. Second, they inform us about the scribal curriculum of Mesopotamian Akkadian and Sumerian scholarly compositions in use there, which is barely attested in Babylonia itself at this period. It is thanks to these school compositions and the ephemeral documentation related to the people who wrote them that we know so much about the scribes, teachers, and students at the site.

The city and its scribal traditions and scribes

The city of Emar was situated at the crossroads of the great political powers of the day: Kassite Babylonia, the kingdom of Mittani, and later the Hittite Empire and the Middle Assyrian Kingdom during the late second millennium. Thanks to its location, throughout its history it served as an important trade route and mercantile centre.

During the Old Babylonian period, for which we have no textual documentation from Emar itself, the city was under the control of Mari, some 250 km further down the Euphrates, as its archives testify (Durand 1990). After the fall of the Amorite kingdoms in Babylonia and the Middle Euphrates region, the city probably came under the influence of the Hurrian kingdom of Mittani in the 16th and 15th centuries. In *c.* 1340–1330 the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I conquered the whole region, Emar and its hinterland included, and imposed Hittite rule from the provincial capital at Carchemish. It is at this period that the Emar textual records commence, allowing us to reconstruct the history of the city over some two centuries. At the beginning the city was virtually independent, ruled over by two apparently local dynasties. Local control seems to have ended during the second half of the 13th century, as the Hittites' grip over the region intensified. The kings of Emar were disposed of or lost their power, and Hittite officials and their local representatives ruled over the city until its destruction at the beginning of the 12th century. The city was destroyed, along with other cities in the Lebanon coast and inland Syria, around 1175 BC (Cohen and Singer 2006).

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The change from local to Hittite rule was also reflected in the scribal traditions and scribal learning. During the early period, when Emar was ruled by local dynasties, the so-called 'Syrian' scribal tradition prevailed. Around or perhaps somewhat before the renewed Hittite control over Emar, it was completely and rather rapidly replaced by the so-called 'Syro-Hittite' tradition. Just as there are two distinct scribal traditions in Emar, so there are two identifiable groups of scribes: the 'Syrian' scribes, followed by the 'Syro-Hittite' scribes. Both 'Syrian' and 'Syro-Hittite' scribes are mostly known as scribes of ephemeral documents, who served the palace or temple administration in the city; they are identified by professional title ^{lú}DUB.SAR 'scribe', which they appended to the end of the documents they drafted. Some, however, can be identified as teachers and their students. They wrote scholarly materials, relevant to their education in the scribal school, as well as leaving traces of their activities in the city's ephemeral documents. Such were the 'Syro-Hittite' scribes of the prominent Zu-Ba'la family of diviners. It is from this family's archive, library, and school—a structure dubbed by the excavators 'Temple M_1' or the 'Temple of the Diviner'—that the majority of the Emar textual finds derive.

The textual remains of 'Temple M_1'—archive, library, and school of the Zu-Ba'la family

All the textual remains found in Emar were written on clay tablets in the cuneiform script. The chief languages committed to writing were Sumerian and Akkadian imported from Mesopotamia, Sumerian being the language of learning, Akkadian the language of diplomacy, administration, and the cult. These languages and cuneiform script were taught not only at Emar but also in the scribal schools of other urban settlements, such as at Ugarit (Soldt 1995; 1999; Roche 2008a; 2008b), Hattusa (Beckman 1983; Torri 2008), the cities of Canaan (Horowitz et al. 2006), and even Egypt, at the city of Akhetaten, the capital of king Akhenaton (Izre'el 1997).

The majority of the tablets were found in a large building now called 'Temple M_1' or 'Temple of the Diviner.' We can arrive at an understanding of this building's function by examining the nature of the textual remains and their archaeological context; that is, by asking in what kind of structure were they housed or archived. The textual remains were mostly concentrated in two areas of the building: its main hall and one of the adjacent rooms, although that was not perhaps their original storage place, since they may have fallen onto the floor when the upper storey collapsed during the building's destruction. The finds include: letters and ephemeral documents relating to the business affairs of the Zu-Ba'la family and a few other prominent individuals of the city; the school texts and student exercises of members of the Zu-Ba'la family; and library or archival copies of rituals and Mesopotamian scholarly materials written by 'Syrian' scribes in the earlier 'Syrian' tradition, generations before the Zu-Ba'la family. The layout of 'Temple M_1' is in no way similar to other Emar temples, such as the double temples dedicated to the

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principal deities of the city, Adad and Ištar. It is a smaller structure with thinner outer walls and its ground-plan is not typical of Syrian Bronze Age temples but identical to other domestic quarters in Emar and other contemporary sites in the area (Werner 1994: 70–71, 108–109; McClellan 1997; Pedersén 1998: 61).

We surmise therefore that the building was not a temple (the modern appellation 'Temple' is thus a misnomer), but rather functioned as the business archive, scribal school, and library of the Zu-Ba'la family. The structure was a private dwelling, large enough to accommodate a family along with some fellow students (*c.* 15 × 7 m). Its size is indeed commensurate with what we can discern of the number of students and teachers engaged in schooling activities. The Emar school with its teachers and students, as can be deduced from the textual evidence, was definitely not a large institution with numerous students, tutors, and teachers as the 'School Dialogues' may lead us to believe. Rather it was a family affair for the most part. In this it followed the pattern already established by the Old Babylonian Mesopotamian schools, where scribal education was conducted in the family home, usually a modest structure, with no more than a few students and their teacher in attendance (Charpin 1986; George 2005; Robson 2001; Tanret 2002).

Students and teachers in Emar

Now that we understand where schooling was conducted in Emar, and the size of the schooling institution, we can see who studied and who taught in the school.

Information about the education of the earlier 'Syrian' scribes is all in all scarce, but enough is available to understand its general layout. Ba'al-belu and Išma'-Dagan, who were educated in the 'Syrian' tradition, left us their colophons (something akin to a long and elaborate signature which includes the scribe's name and personal details) at the end of their school copies. Their colophons read as follows:

> (The copy is) completed; collated.
> Total of 315 lines.
> The hand of Ba'al-bēlu, novice diviner
> servant of Nabu and Nisaba.
>
> ---
>
> (The copy is) completed and collated.
> Total of 275 lines.
> Išma'-Dagan, novice diviner,
> servant of Nabu, Nisaba, and [...].
> (Cohen 2009: 133)

The colophons identify the two as ì.ZU TUR.TUR 'novice diviners'. This title is indicative of their lower status in relation to their supervisors, as well as of their relationship with the profession of the diviner, about which more will be said below. They are also called the 'servants' of Nabu and Nisaba, the patron deities of the Mesopotamian scribal world, whose role, as far as we can understand it, was something like that of a patron saint—representing the scribal art and providing his or her divine protection.

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The colophons also identify the type of composition copied (by giving the first line, not included here, of the following tablet in the series) and the number of lines which each student managed to copy out. The students' assignment was the study of the first tablet (from fifteen) of a lexical list called UR_5.RA = *hubullu*, one of the basic building blocks of Mesopotamian scribal education. Although the age of the students cannot be determined, it can be assumed that they were near the beginning of their education. Whether they continued their studies in the school is somewhat doubtful as no additional colophons for the two exist. The recycling of school tablets in the clay-bin might account for the relative paucity of the surviving exercises from these two students, although we know of other Emar students who copied from near the end of the UR_5.RA = *hubullu* list, thus completing their elementary stage of training at the school.

The student Ribi-Dagan, also educated in the 'Syrian' tradition, was much further advanced than the two young students. Also identified in his colophons as a novice diviner, he was responsible for copying three scholarly compositions. Apart from the third tablet of the lexical list UR_5.RA = *hubullu*, he copied, on the very same tablet, a difficult scholarly work—an incantation to ward off disease—and on another tablet, an additional lexical list now called the S^a Vocabulary. In his colophons he not only invokes Nabu and Nisaba but also calls upon Ea, the divine patron of learning, and two additional rather obscure deities, perhaps more as an attempt to show off his erudition than as a statement of his personal piety towards these gods. He also tells us of his extraordinary circumstances at the school:

> The hand of Ribi-Dagan
> servant of Nabu and Nisaba.
> I w[rote] this tablet (when) I was placed
> in bronze chains during the period of [some days].
> (Cohen 2009: 129; after Civil 1989: 7)

This revealing information is unique in surviving colophons, but perhaps was the fate of junior scribes elsewhere. The 'School Dialogues' tell of a student chained up in the schoolhouse as punishment (Vanstiphout 1997: 590, ll. 150–153), while a report from 7th-century Nineveh tells of a prominent young man from Babylonia forced to work at copying tablets while in chains as a prisoner of the Assyrians (Fales and Postgate 1995: no. 156). The lot of our scribe Ribi-Dagan may have been the result of his being in debt, which he was forced to pay off by copying tablets. Because his personal seal was impressed on one of his tablets (a very unconventional procedure—seals were generally impressed on economic documents), we can deduce that he was not a child but perhaps a young adult of some affluence: only adults had seals, which, in cuneiform culture, implied prestige and social standing.

We do not know who educated these early 'Syrian' scribes, but a clue to their family and professional background can be adduced from the case of Ba'al-baru and his son Mašru-he. Ba'al-baru the diviner wrote one of the most beautifully produced manuscripts in Emar—a lexical list called SAG, 'head'. It was probably considered a master copy because it was archived in 'Temple M_1' by the Zu-Ba'la family, long after his death. His

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son, Mašru-he, is not known to us from his activity in the scribal school but only from documents which he himself wrote as a scribe and others which mention him. Like his father, he was an accomplished diviner, who was generously awarded by Emar's king Pilsu-Dagan for his divinatory skills applied in times of distress:

> When the Hurrian troops surrounded the walls of Emar, Mašru-he was then the diviner of the king and the city. Now, his divination (about the enemies being defeated) came about. Therefore, king Pilsu-Dagan has given him this very field as his gift. (*There follows a description of the property bestowed upon the diviner*.) (Cohen 2009: 123)

We can assume that Ba'al-baru instilled in his son the arts of the diviner and, being an accomplished scribe, also taught him the use of the cuneiform script. We learn from this case that the practice of divination and the scribal profession were closely linked in Emar and were passed on from father to son (cf. Charpin 2008: 46–48 on the diviners at Mari). We also see that the possession of literacy, apart from securing the job of a scribe, could open a door to power and influence, such as the position of diviner to the king and city.

Indeed, the scribal family to be considered next held the most prestigious role in the city after the Hittite takeover and the end of local rule. Members of the Zu-Ba'la family (whose building 'Temple M_1' we have already discussed above) held the title 'Diviner of the gods of the city of Emar'. It did not give direct political power, but the diviners were responsible for the maintenance of the temples and the Hittite cult in the city, thus enjoying the support of their overlords. As a consequence, their economic status was very high, as testified by the many economic documents dealing with their purchase of property and slaves. It is not clear if the older members of the family, the patriarch Zu-Ba'la and his son Ba'al-qarrad, had any scribal abilities. Ba'al-qarrad's sons Šaggar-abu and Ba'al-malik, however, were both educated men. Šaggar-abu was already writing works of considerable difficulty in his student days, signing his name in the colophons in a cryptographic manner as so as to boast of his erudition. Šaggar-abu also inherited the position of 'Diviner of the gods of the city of Emar' from his father, just like the 'Syrian' scribes and diviners, Ba'al-baru and his son Mašru-he. But Šaggar-abu died before long and his youngest brother, Ba'al-malik, inherited the title and the cultic duties which went with it. He also was responsible for running the scribal school, as well as for overseeing the family business. His seal is found stamped on private family transactions, such as slave purchases, and dockets related to the administration of the cult. Ba'al-malik was a teacher in the school and was responsible in all likelihood for the education of at least one of his two sons, Zuzu (who took the name of his great-grandfather, Zu-Ba'la, in his colophons). Zuzu's scholarly career was nipped in the bud, however, because the city was destroyed around the time he lived.

So far we have concentrated on the family itself. But the responsibility for educating the Zu-Ba'la family was not limited to the older members of the household. A certain Kidin-Gula, who probably came from the land of Suhu to the south of Emar, or from northern Babylonia, belonged to the colony of foreign merchants at the city (Cohen 2004). We can assume that merchants, like diviners, were cuneiform literate, the most

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notable example being the colony of Assyrian merchants at Kaneš in central Anatolia, in the 20th to mid-18th centuries (Charpin 2008: 39–40). Kidin-Gula frequented the Zu-Ba'la residence and taught its inhabitants, overseeing their production of lexical lists. Consider one of his students' colophons:

> The hand of [so and so, so]n of Ba'[al-qar]rad, the diviner,
> Servant of Ba'al and Sin, student of Kidin-Gula. (Cohen 2009: 184)

This colophon and others are rather broken but they specifically mention Zu-Ba'la family members as Kidin-Gula's students (Ba'al-qarrad, as we have seen, was Zu-Ba'la's son). How much, if at all, Kidin-Gula was paid for his services remains unknown, but his circumstances were probably not all that unusual. Although our data is scanty, independent itinerant teachers and scholars were apparently a feature of the schools of the period, mostly documented in royal settings (Beckman 1983; Soldt 2001), with precedents in more domestic contexts already in the Old Babylonian period (Tanret 2004 and in this volume).

Fathers and sons

Not surprisingly, our most detailed knowledge how trades were passed down the generations comes from scribes, who proudly supply in their colophons and scholarly annotations information about their family, and sometimes their illustrious, if not wholly fictitious, ancestors (Beaulieu 2000; Lambert 1957). Such 'dynasties' of other professionals are not as well documented, but evidence of generations of families working in the same professions can be found (see, e.g., Robson 2008: 166–176; Steinkeller 1987). We learn from a variety of cuneiform sources that artisans more generally taught their trade to their sons, who followed in their fathers' footsteps. An Old Babylonian Sumerian literary composition now called *A Father and his Perverse Son* (ETCSL 5.1.2) informs us that '…it is in accordance with the fate decreed by Enlil for man that a son follows the work of his father' (Kramer 1957: 173). Letters found in Assurbanipal's library in 7th-century Nineveh were written by a young scribe, and, upon completion, examined by his father, who was presumably also his teacher (Frame and George 2005). A few hundred years later, a colophon of an astrological text warns the reader that he is to teach its contents to his beloved son alone and nobody else (Finkel 2000: 141 n. 11). A father's obligation to teach his trade to his sons was so important that it became a defining feature of father–son relationships. Two of the Laws of Hammurabi (*c.* 1760 BC) concern the adoption of children by craftsmen:

> §188 If a craftsman takes a young child to rear and then teaches him his craft, he will not be reclaimed.
>
> §189 If he should not teach him his craft, that rearling shall return to his father's house. (Roth 1995: 119)

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According to these laws, a child reared by an artisan could only be claimed back by his father if the artisan had not taught him his trade. By teaching him, the artisan received custody over the child and became his legal father (Roth 1979: 181–183; Westbrook 1993: 198–199). Because trade usually passed from one generation to the next within a single family, there arose no special need to document the practice, and therefore references to professional training in cuneiform sources are scarce. Only exceptional cases, when a youngster left his home to be trained and serve as an apprentice to someone other than his father, have left their mark in history. Such cases, as we will see, are documented in the Neo-Babylonian apprenticeship contracts.

Neo-Babylonian apprenticeship contracts

During the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods (the 7th–3rd centuries BC), after centuries of political and economic repression by the Assyrian Empire, Babylon enjoyed major economic growth. Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus, two of the most famous kings of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, initiated a wide range of construction works, which saw craftsmen, artisans, and labourers brought to the capital and supported with food rations. During this peaceful and prosperous time a few Babylonian families, who fostered ties with the political establishment, managed to accumulate significant property and wealth. One such family, the most notable to appear in the apprenticeship contracts, was the Egibi family of Babylon. They were established in Babylon by the end of the 7th century BC, and within two generations managed to purchase land and slaves and perform services for the palace and temple households. Egibi family members were also engaged in agricultural trade as well as investing in financial enterprises and industry. It is perhaps not too surprising therefore that we find the bulk of our evidence for apprenticeship in the cuneiform world in this social and historical context.

Our written sources comprise some thirty-five contracts. These legal documents, from the archive of the Ebabbar temple in Sippar and from private family archives in Babylon, Borsippa, Nippur, and Sippar, record the terms and conditions by which a youngster was to learn a trade (San Nicolò 1950; Petschow 1980; Dandamaev 1984: 279–304; Jursa 2005: 37; Hackl 2010).

The most frequently attested profession in this small corpus is bakery and cooking: seven contracts deal with training for this profession (in one of which the apprentice also learns butchery). Bakers were very important temple workers, who baked the bread and cakes given as offerings to the gods, and cooked the meat from the sacrificial animals. They also baked the bread which was given as rations to other temple employees (Bongenaar 1997: 166–167; Salonen 1970: 164–186; Driel 2002: 118 n. 112; and see Brunke in this volume).

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The textile industry was also very popular. We find in the apprenticeship contracts three weavers, a tailor, two bleachers, and a sack maker. The contracts specify exactly which craft the master was to teach. One apprentice weaver, for example, was taught the art of making coloured *suhātu* cloths (Jursa 2006: no. 9), while another learnt 'all the techniques necessary to work with byssus [a silk made from shellfish] and wool' (Jursa 2006: no. 10), and an apprentice tailor learned how to make high-value *lamhuššû* cloths. While each apprentice seemingly learned a specific craft, many textile workers in that period were multi-skilled. Most weavers in the temples were also bleachers, and many weavers of coloured wool were also cloth menders or dyers (Bongenaar 1997: 300–302; Kümmel 1979; Salonen 1970: 248–286, 308).

In order to understand what these contracts looked like and what their legal aim was, let us closely examine one which apprentices a slave to a carpenter.

> Arad-Nergal son of Bel-uṣuršu, the servant of Belšunu governor of Eber-nari, gave Nabu-bulliṭanni, Belšunu's slave, to Bel-ittannu son of Nabu-uṣuršu for a period of six years, to learn carpentry. He (Bel-ittannu) will teach him (Nabu-bulliṭanni) the entire craft of carpentry, his workmanship, as he himself had learnt it. If he teaches him, Arad-Nergal will give Bel-ittannu one-third of a mina of silver as his 'gift'. Should he not teach him, (Bel-ittannu) will give Arad-Nergal one mina of silver as his (the apprentice's) wage. Until the end of the (training) period, Arad-Nergal will provide Nabu-bulliṭanni with food and clothing. (*There follow a list of witnesses and the date of the contract*.) (After Oelsner 1976: 316–317)

We see that this contract, as others do, starts with a statement of purpose: a slave is handed over to a craftsman for him to be taught a trade. The craftsman is promised a reward if he fulfils his part of the deal and threatened with a fine if he does not. Next, an additional stipulation is given: the initiator of the contract commits to providing the apprentice's food and clothing during the apprenticeship period. In other contracts we find different stipulations or clarifications, such as the date that the training begins or a fine imposed on whoever breaches the contract.

The structure of the Neo-Babylonian apprenticeship contracts is basically uniform, and scribes probably learnt how to draft them as part of their own training. Indeed, a school exercise in the form of an apprenticeship contract stands as testimony to this hypothesis (Gurney 1989: 35–36). The contracts' structural consistency also testifies to the existence of apprenticeship as a formalized social institution, whose fundamental principles were recognized by all.

In spite of their structural uniformity, the terms of the contracts differ greatly. The length of the training is different in every case, as are the financial arrangements. No two contracts' terms are identical, and there is no particular uniformity in distribution across time, place, occupation, or participants' social status. Therefore, although the social structure of apprenticeship was apparently fixed, specific terms were set in each case in accordance with local circumstances. In this respect the Neo- and Late Babylonian apprenticeship contracts resemble their counterparts from such diverse times and places as Roman Egypt and medieval Europe (Orme 2006; Willemsen 2008). Their great

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variability is helpful to historians, as they divulge many details about the apprentices-to-be, their teachers and masters, and their professions about which we would have otherwise been relatively ignorant.

The apprentices and their guardians

In the contract translated above we saw that the apprentice was not an independent adult who initiated his own training. The same situation pertains in all other surviving contracts. The apprentices were usually slaves or temple oblates who were sent to be trained by their owners or, occasionally, boys sent to be trained by their parents or brothers. In either case they were not parties to the contracts, but objects, transferred from the hand of the initiators of the contracts—their owners or guardians—to the hand of the master-craftsmen.

The apprentice probably lived at his master's house. The contracts sometimes state that the apprentice was 'given' to the craftsman, as in the example above, and in other cases that he was in the craftsman's custody. Some contracts also specify that the apprentice will be sustained by his guardian, implying that he had left home and was living elsewhere.

The apprentices in the Neo- and Late Babylonian contracts were all boys, although a few documents from earlier periods mention girls learning a trade, usually music. For example, an Old Babylonian text states:

> Šinunutum, the blind girl, was brought to me on the 18th day of Ṭebetu (Month X) in order to learn the musician's craft. (UMM G40, after Szlechter 1963: II no. 151)

It has been suggested that the absence of girls from the Neo-Babylonian apprenticeship contracts is merely a matter of chance (San Nicolò 1950: 7), but there might have been an additional reason. A girl's chastity may have been at risk if she left her home for training in somebody else's house. In the same way, in medieval Europe the apprenticeship of girls was far less common than that of boys, and was usually restricted to the family's own workshop (Shahar 1990: 239).

We do not know the apprentices' ages, as they are never mentioned in the contracts. We do know that the free apprentices, namely those who were not slaves, were young boys, because they were given for apprenticeship by their parents or guardians. Slave apprentices would not have been any older: it was more profitable for the slave-owner to contract a child, who was not yet experienced in any other kind of work, and with many years of productive work ahead of him, than a fully competent adult whose household labour would have been more greatly missed. Gehlken (2005) tried to determine at what ages people in Mesopotamia were considered fit for work. He studied several archives in which groups of craftsmen were recorded for long periods of time, and noted for how many years each craftsman is attested in the archive. Using a statistical analysis on the active occupation years of these craftsmen, he was able to suggest that boys started their professional training at the age of fourteen or fifteen (Gehlken 2005: 102, 107 n. 25), at a similar age to other pre-industrial societies where

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data is more readily available. In archaic Greece boys started their professional training around the age of fourteen (Hibler 1988: 71), in Roman Egypt between twelve and fourteen (Bradley 1991: 107–108), while in early 14th-century London the minimum age for apprenticeship was fourteen (Hanawalt 1995: 113). In these societies, as in Mesopotamia, children started working much earlier, performing simple tasks appropriate to their age even before they were sent away for training.

Whether the apprentice was a free boy or a slave the contract drawn up was essentially the same. However, it was far more common to impose fines on the initiator of the contract when the apprentice was a free boy rather than a slave. It may be that when parents, especially widowed mothers, gave away their child, his absence was felt more keenly in the household than that of a slave on a big estate. The risk that parents would withdraw their child before the end of the contract was consequently greater, and the masters had to protect themselves better in these cases.

Sending a son or slave to be trained was an investment. Once trained, the skilled worker could be assigned to specialized tasks, and thus be more profitable to the household than a simple, untrained labourer. However, training had high costs in the short term. The initiators of the contracts usually had to pay the master on completion of the apprenticeship, and sometimes had to provide for the apprentice during the training. But most importantly they had to relinquish the apprentice's work capacity for several years. It is not surprising to find that slave owners who initiated their slaves' training were often from the wealthiest families. Indeed the Egibi family sent six slaves for training, four of them within about a decade. They could relinquish so many working hands because the family owned hundreds of slaves, while other rich families usually owned around ten to thirty.

Unlike the students and teachers, who were all male, we find a few women amongst the initiators of the contracts. Some women apprenticed their own slaves, or the slaves of their husbands who were away on business. Five women sent their own sons away for training. These were most likely widows, who were trying to build a better future for their sons after their husbands' deaths.

Master-craftsmen and their 'tuition fees'

The master-craftsmen were usually free men, but some were slaves. Some of the slaves worked for the most influential people of their time, such as the governor of Nippur and even the crown prince Cambyses, later king of Persia. They were engaged in a wide variety of professions: cooking, textile manufacturing, processing raw materials such as metals or wood, and even architecture and cultic dancing.

In most cases, the master received payment for his teaching. He was paid either directly, in silver or in kind (usually clothes), or indirectly, by the apprentice himself in working days for a set period of time, presumably after the end of the training.

When a direct payment was given, the sums of money involved were relatively small, ranging from 1 to 5 shekels of silver (*c.* 8–40 g). Only in the contract translated

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above does the sum differ significantly from the standard, at one-third of a mina (20 shekels, *c.* 165 g) of silver. In cases where the apprentice paid for the training by working for his master the final payment could be much higher, depending on the amount of post-apprenticeship time he had to serve. If we estimate the value of the apprentice's work at 1 shekel of silver per month—the amount often described as the 'standard' work fee in this period (Jursa 2005: 56)—we can see that over several years of work, the master's reward could have reached up to 60 shekels of silver.

There are three contracts in which the masters were not paid for the teaching, but instead had to pay for the use of the apprentice. They did so with the products of their workshops: a leather worker usually paid ten sandals per year for his apprentice, and a mouse-hunter paid fifty mice (meant for consumption) a year. In short, the training fees, and even the question of who should be paid, were matters of negotiation in the contracts. In the late second-millennium Hittite Laws, by contrast, a fixed price of 6 shekels and one person is the fee for professional training:

> §200b If anyone gives (his) son for training either (as) a carpenter or a smith, a weaver or a leather worker or a fuller, he shall pay 6 shekels of silver as (the fee) for the training. If the teacher makes him an expert, he shall give him one person. (After Hoffner 1997: 158–159)

As Hoffner (1997: 227, 159 n. 573) points out, the language of law §200b leaves the question of who should pay whom open to interpretation. We cannot tell for sure whether the master keeps the apprentice and gives his father a person in his stead, or whether it is the other way around: the master releases the apprentice from his service, and the father compensates him with another person.

We can assume that the Neo-Babylonian master enjoyed the fruits of the apprentice's labour throughout the training, whether he was paid in silver, in clothes, or in a period of service, or received no payment at all. It is difficult to estimate the profit the master made from his apprentice's labour. When assessing the apprentice's productivity we have to take into account variables such as the apprentice's age and his stage of training, as well as the nature of the craft, the level of specialization it required and the value of the finished products.

When the apprentice began his training he could only carry out simple tasks which did not require special skills. But as he progressed the master could assign him more complex, and therefore more valuable, tasks, although this depended on the nature of the skill acquired. For example, an apprentice bleacher could probably carry out most tasks involved in the trade, whereas a young seal-cutter might have needed a great deal of practice before he was allowed to lay his hands on expensive raw materials, and therefore took longer before he started to make a profit for his master.

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Conclusions

The textual evidence from Emar has offered us an almost unparalleled view of the activities and lives of teachers and students of a late second-millennium scribal school. Because both the ephemeral documents and the scholarly materials derive from a single archaeological context and relate to the same social and historical environment, we could uniquely reconstruct some of the working of this institution and the activities of those involved within and without its walls. We could see that Mesopotamian learning was diffused not only to the large urban centres but also to smaller provincial towns like Emar. There this learning was transmitted from father to son and, in the case of the Zu-Ba'la family, with the occasional support of the foreign teacher Kidin-Gula. This was probably very much as it had been for centuries, in Babylonia and other outposts of cuneiform culture.

The Neo- and Late Babylonian apprenticeship contracts give us another viewpoint on professional training: they teach us of the terms and conditions under which apprenticeship was conducted. Through them we can learn at what age professional training began, who received such training, and what it cost. The contracts mostly reflect the economic aspects of training, thus reminding us that apprenticeship was first and foremost an economic investment, carried out in accordance with the capabilities and needs of the parties involved.

To what extent was the training of scribes conducted in the same way as training for other professions? Contrary, perhaps, to what we might expect, the surviving apprenticeship contracts do not provide us with information regarding scribal education. This situation is perhaps a matter of accident, because there is circumstantial evidence for slaves being sent away for scribal training. In a letter from the early Neo-Babylonian archive of the governor of Nippur (Cole 1996: no. 83) the writer asks that a slave be sent over to him in order to learn to read with the other apprentices. The letter does not specify what the training terms were, but one can imagine that they were not much different from those of any other craft, as described in the apprenticeship contracts we know of.

Further reading

For up-to-date reference works on Emar, see Cohen et al. (2008); Faist et al. (2007). On the Emar scribal schools see Cohen (2009) and d'Alfonso et al. (2008); on Neo-Babylonian apprenticeship contracts see Dandamaev (1984: 279–307) and Petschow (1980–1983); on crafts and craftsmen see Matthews (1995) and Hackl (2010); on Neo-Babylonian law and economy see Abraham (2004), Oelsner et al. (2003), Wunsch (2007), and Jursa (2010); on slavery see Dandamaev (1984) and Baker (2001).

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CHAPTER 12

PATRON AND CLIENT: ZIMRI-LIM AND ASQUDUM THE DIVINER

DOMINIQUE CHARPIN

'Zimri-Lim, appointed by the god Dagan; Asqudum, the diviner': this legend on Asqudum's seal emblematically presents both his status and his close relationship with the king of Mari, for whom he worked during the last years of his life (Durand 1988: 71). Relations between the Neo-Assyrian emperors and the scholars in their entourage are very well known, notably thanks to the correspondence received by Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (Parpola 1993); both astrologers and diviners acted as the king's counsellors (see Radner in this volume). More than a millennium earlier, the archives of Mari offer us a privileged case study through the documents of the diviner Asqudum. It shows us the varied activities of one of the highest-ranking officials in the kingdom of Mari, first when it was integrated into the empire of Samsi-Addu, under the reign of his son Yasmah-Addu (*c.* 1787–1775 BC), but especially during the first half of the reign of Zimri-Lim (1775–1762 BC), when Mari was again independent.

Zimri-Lim entrusted Asqudum with important administrative, diplomatic, and military responsibilities. In particular, he was charged with negotiating Zimri-Lim's marriage to the princess Šibtu, and then with accompanying her from Aleppo to the home of her new spouse. During his career Asqudum traversed the entire extent of the kingdom of Mari: his presence is attested on the Euphrates from Halabit (modern Halebiye) to Harbu in Suhu, that is, up to the frontier with the eastern neighbour state Ešnunna, and on the Habur river up to the city of Qaṭṭunan. Asqudum participated in military campaigns in the Habur triangle. His missions abroad led him to Qaṭna in western Syria as well as to Aleppo, where he went at least three times; but he never seems to have returned to his home city of Ekallatum in northern Iraq. Asqudum's case constitutes a typical example of the importance of person-to-person relationships in the ancient Near East, beyond family hierarchies and tribal affiliations.

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Abundant and varied documentation

The documentation relative to Asqudum was discovered in the Old Babylonian city of Mari (modern Tell Hariri on the middle Euphrates) in two different places: in the large royal palace, like the rest of the 'royal archives of Mari', but also in the 'Small Eastern Palace' (Figure 12.1), which was his residence at the start of Zimri-Lim's reign.[1]

Some 8500 tablets found in the royal palace of Mari have been published to date, of which around 2500 are letters (Charpin 2008b). To start with, Asqudum's name appears in the correspondence: he was the sender or recipient of eighty-four letters. Asqudum wrote

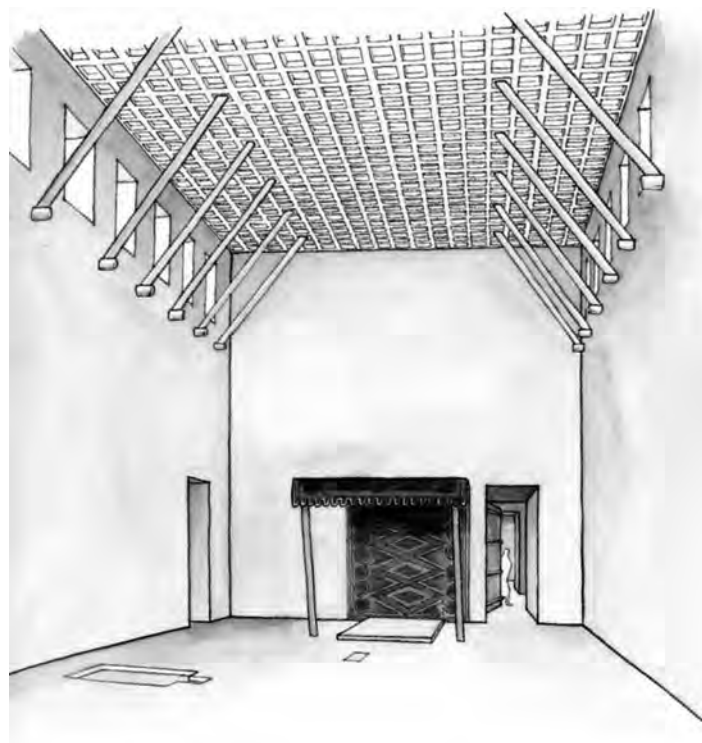

FIGURE 12.1 The reception suite ('salle du trône') of the 'Small Eastern Palace' at Mari, where Asqudum had his living quarters. (Drawing by N. Bresch, reproduced from Margueron 2004: 423, pl. 54)

[1] Years ZL 0–4; the chronology in Charpin (1985b) is superseded by Charpin and Ziegler (2003: 174). During Zimri-Lim's reign, years (which start in spring) were given names commemorating special events such as successful military campaigns or royal dedications to the gods. For convenience, they are here given a number corresponding to their chronological place within Zimri-Lim's reign: ZL 1 to 4; the first months do not constitute a complete year, hence 'ZL 0'. A notation 25/iv/ZL 1 means the 25th day of the fourth month in the first complete regnal year of Zimri-Lim.

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sixty-five letters 'to my lord'—that is, to the king of Mari. The difficulty here, as usual, is the absence of the sovereign's name from the correspondence written for his attention (with the exception of one letter addressed 'to my lord Yasmah-Addu'; Durand 1988: no. 88). Internal analysis allows us to estimate that seven letters were addressed to Yasmah-Addu and fifty-eight to Zimri-Lim, ten of which he co-authored with someone else. But the most interesting fact concerns the nineteen further letters: Asqudum addressed seven of these to four individuals other than the king, but of particular interest are the twelve letters in which he figures as addressee. This is rather unusual: indeed we do not expect to find mail in the king's archive that is addressed to anyone but him. In Asqudum's case it is difficult to explain this situation (Durand 1988: 75 n. 37); it is highly likely that he himself had sent on to the king certain letters that he had received. Even outside his own correspondence, Asqudum's name features in numerous letters; it is equally frequent in the administrative documentation.

The difficulty posed by such an abundance of information is the possible existence of homonyms: we cannot be sure that all references to 'Asqudum' concern the same individual (Durand 1988: 76–79). In certain cases the presence of a title makes it possible to decide: there was, for instance, a fuller with this name at Mari under Yasmah-Addu (Bottéro 1957: nos. 57 and 78) and a shepherd under Zimri-Lim (Birot 1960: no. 24, ii 16; no. 27, ii 35). On the other hand it is not clear whether the *abarakkum*-administrator of Durand 1988: no. 8 should be identified with our diviner or not (Heimpel 2003: 180 no. 8 n. 1). We might equally wonder whether the letters like those from Hulalum (Durand 1988: no. 75) or Ṣidqum-lanasi (Lafont 1988: nos. 538 and 549) concern the commercial activities of 'our' Asqudum, outside his official functions, or those of a merchant of the same name. The first alternative is highly likely: elsewhere Hulalum mentions that the tin about which he speaks is not his but belongs to a diviner in his entourage.

In addition to the archives found in the royal palace at Mari, we have Asqudum's domestic archive. Around 150 tablets document in detail the management of his home and the roles played there by members of his family. Between 1979 and 1990 the excavation of 'site A' in the north of Mari revealed most of a 'small eastern palace' (Margueron 2004: 446–451), which produced some 330 tablets. They are still unedited but a preliminary report on the discoveries made between 1979 and 1984 has already been published (Charpin 1985a: 267–268; Charpin 1985b). The texts enable us to understand the life of the building in four different periods of its long history. The oldest phase dates back to when power was held by kings with the title *šakkanakku*, in particular Puzur-Eštar (r. 1980–1950 BC: Durand 2008a). This 'small palace' was then occupied by Yasmah-Addu when his father installed him as king of Mari (Charpin 1985a: 267–268). While major works were carried out in the large royal palace the young king lived in this building, as several dozen tablets witness, which are mostly dated to 1787–1782 BC. The third assemblage constitutes Asqudum's archives, which cover the first four years of Zimri-Lim's reign (Charpin 1985b). Finally a dozen texts from Zimri-Lim's 11th year seem to show that the building was then transferred to queen Šibtu after Asqudum's death (Ziegler 1997: 55–56; 2010: 442).

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The oldest of Asqudum's tablets uncovered in the house dates to the very early reign of Zimri-Lim (2/xi/ZL 0): he must have settled in this prestigious building less than two months after Zimri-Lim's arrival at Mari. A letter from Bannum (of whom see more below) to Asqudum undoubtedly alludes to this event:

> Concerning your house about which you have written to me, earlier you wrote: 'I have taken two houses but I want to take (= keep) the best and give up the other'. That is what you said to me. Now, you can live in whichever house pleases you: no-one will approach your house! (Durand 1988: no. 7)

It seems certain that the 'small eastern palace' represents the house that Asqudum chose to keep.

We should not mistake the nature of the 150 tablets found in the 'small palace' which date to the start of Zimri-Lim's reign: they are fragments, which represent just a tiny part of the domestic management records of this building while it was inhabited by Asqudum and his household. It is essentially the contents of several storage baskets. Thus the label of one tablet-basket reads: 'Tablets of wool and fabrics received by [someone]' (Charpin 2001: 27). In fact some sixty tablets were unearthed just next to it, half of which fit the description on this label. In spite of their lacunary state, these texts have the great interest of showing that the households of high-ranking officials were managed in writing, in the same way as the palace but functioning on a smaller scale (Charpin 1996).

Finally, we should note one reference to Asqudum outside Mari: a letter found at Tell Rimah (ancient Qaṭṭara) shows him occupied with the transportation of a battering ram (Dalley, Walker and Hawkins 1976: no. 9).

Problematically for us, in Asqudum's time letters were never dated and cross-references with the administrative texts are far too infrequent to help us to reconstruct the chronological order of his correspondence. We are thus led to study Asqudum's activities thematically; but we must not forget that in reality these different threads were constantly intertwined.

A servant of Yasmah-Addu, put to good use by Zimri-Lim

Diviners, unlike prophets, were in no way attached to temples: they were in the service of their 'clients', the most prestigious of whom were kings. That is why we should not be surprised by the seal legends of diviners who present themselves as 'servants' of a king, such as 'Apil-ilišu, son of Ibal-[pi-El], diviner, servant of Yasmah-Addu' (Durand 1988: 232). We know besides that the distribution of diviners between Samsi-Addu, Išme-Dagan, and Yasmah-Addu sometimes caused discord between the 'great king' and his sons (Durand 1988: no. 138; 1997: no. 61); they had similar quarrels about the assignment of scribes and medics (Durand 1988: no. 296; Ziegler and Charpin 2007: 69–72). In all cases, the privileged link tying the sovereign to a diviner, just as to his secretary or

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doctor, rested in the confidence and certainty that its intimacy would not be betrayed. As a contemporary wrote, 'Apart from the diviner's secret, what other secret is there?' (Durand 1988: no. 104, ll. 14–15).

Asqudum was originally from Ekallatum, Samsi-Addu's capital in what is today northern Iraq (Ziegler 2002); he was probably among the personnel sent by Samsi-Addu to his son Yasmah-Addu to assist in managing the kingdom of Mari. One important but damaged tablet specifies that it fell to Asqudum to 'take the omens for the health of the land' (Durand 1988: 247–248). Outside his own correspondence, he is badly documented at this period; in fact the references to him in administrative texts are all eponym dates of Asqudum,[2] almost certainly a homonym of our diviner (Durand 1988: 72 n. 6). There thus remains only a contract dated to the eponym-year of Awiliya, in which Asqudum lends $5\frac{1}{2}$ shekels of silver to one Uštašni-Il (Boyer 1958: no. 50).

We know that, under Zimri-Lim, Asqudum was married to the princess Yamama, described on her seal as 'daughter of Yahdun-Lim, wife of Asqudum' (Charpin 1985b: 456). Officially, Zimri-Lim was defined as the 'son of Yahdun-Lim', even if their actual relationship was different—Yahdun-Lim was probably his uncle or grandfather (Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 45). Asqudum was thus Zimri-Lim's in-law. The question is to know how far back the marriage went. I had at one point thought that it could date to Yahdun-Lim's reign (Charpin 1985b: 456) but that was before we knew that Asqudum was originally from Ekallatum (thanks to the publication of Durand 1988: no. 5): this hypothesis can now be ruled out. Jean-Marie Durand (1988: 12) had thought it likely that the marriage dated to the beginning of Zimri-Lim's reign, but Nele Ziegler (1999b: 56) concluded that it took place during the time of Yasmah-Addu. The consequent image of Asqudum's career is very different in each case. On the one hand, we could draw a parallel with Yasim-Sumu. This scribe was rapidly promoted to 'finance minister' (*šandabakkum*) by Zimri-Lim, who gave him his daughter Duhšatum in marriage at the same time (Ziegler 1999a: 62–63). On the other hand, it could be that because Asqudum was *already* a member of the royal family through marriage that Zimri-Lim chose to take him into his confidence. As we now know, Yasmah-Addu tried to marry several of his dignitaries to Yahdun-Lim's daughters, who had been discovered in the palace of Mari, still very young, at the time of Samsi-Addu's victory (Ziegler 1999b).

In any case, on arriving at Mari, Zimri-Lim retained many of the previous regime's officials (Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 185). He kept, for instance, the chief musician Rišiya, the governors Habduma-Dagan and Sumu-hadu, and even married the queen of Mari, Dam-hurași, who had been Yasmah-Addu's principal wife. It is in this context that Zimri-Lim likewise attached to himself the service of the diviner Asqudum—and if the latter were already Yamama's husband that would constitute a further reason to leave him in place. We should in any case recall that Asqudum was not the only diviner in Yasmah-Addu's service who continued his work under Zimri-Lim: we could mention Zikri-Hanat and Zimri-Dagan (Durand 1988: 255–256) and perhaps also Hali-hadun (Durand

[2] During Yasmah-Addu's reign, years were not given year names as described for Zimri-Lim's reign. Instead, they were each given the name of a dignitary (called 'eponym' in modern research).

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1988: 237). We can presume that Asqudum, like every diviner entering Zimri-Lim's service, had to swear an oath of loyalty, whose wording has been recovered (Durand 1988: no. 1).

It is difficult to know whether Asqudum pursued his divinatory activities following his recruitment by Zimri-Lim, or whether he abandoned them in order to act more like a senior official charged with diverse missions by the new king. It is clear that at the very moment of his recruitment by Zimri-Lim his role as diviner was seen as problematic, at least by one senior figure. Bannum, one of the principal chiefs of the Sim'alite tribe, had played a key role in Zimri-Lim's succession (Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 175–176). When he heard that Zimri-Lim had been taking Asqudum's advice, he wrote a letter of remonstration to the king:

> Is it good that Asqudum never stops suggesting to you improper things and that you never stop listening to his proposals? (…) While I was busy in Mari, Asqudum told you improper things and you installed him as *sugāgum*-mayor of Hišamta! (…) Again, he deceived you and you installed Enlil-ipuš as major-domo (*abu bītim*) of Hišamta. Arriving at Saggaratum I heard talk of nothing else and I exclaimed at the scandal, shouting out: 'What? You install a man from Ekallatum as *sugāgum*-mayor of Hišamta and you install Enlil-ipuš as major-domo of Hišamta! (…) Asqudum, my prisoner, ponders to himself about improper matters. You should name to posts servants whom the person of my lord and the Sim'alites have nothing to complain of. I have seen that this man is inclined to evil and that he holds discussions with my lord that are motivated by ill intentions. Once he had installed in post the former servants of Išme-Dagan, Išme-Dagan, learning this news, will say joyfully to himself: 'It's those former servant of mine who [keep] their posts; they will provoke the return (of my power) to this land without it costing me a loaf!' (…) There are trustworthy diviners who remain in my lord's service: these men, Sim'alites, are devoted to the person of my lord. (Durand 1988: no. 5)

Analysis of this letter enables us to comprehend the reasons for Bannum's rage (Durand 1988: 11–12). He could not accept that Zimri-Lim had recruited Asqudum when the king could have put his trust in equally competent diviners who, like him, belonged to the Sim'alite tribe. Bannum also underlined the danger represented by Asqudum's proximity to the king for nominations to other posts, given his origins in Ekallatum, home of the recently ousted dynasty. This fear is explained when we know that those who took up their posts submitted to an 'oracular enquiry': clearly, although somewhat obliquely, Bannum is accusing Asqudum of wanting to manipulate the omens to favour the nomination of Samsi-Addu's former servants to key posts in the kingdom. For Bannum the affair was most serious: it concerned the survival of the kingdom. Despite this vigorous warning, Zimri-Lim retained his confidence in Asqudum. Was that naïve of him? We have no reason to think so. At the start of his reign Zimri-Lim seems to have taken care to retain as large a 'panel' of diviners as possible: he had Sim'alite diviners close to him; he kept on diviners such as Asqudum and Zimri-Dagan who had worked for Yasmah-Addu; but equally he tried to attract an Aleppan diviner to Mari, Yal'a-Addu (Durand 1988: 252–253).

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FIGURE 12.2 Clay liver models from Mari. (Photo © Mission Archéologique de Mari, reproduced from Margueron 2004: 507, Figure 496)

Another document from the start of Zimri-Lim's reign again shows Asqudum acting as diviner. In a letter (Durand 1988: no. 7), Bannum cites a letter of Asqudum's in which the latter says that he has taken omens for the district of [Mari?] and asks Bannum to have omens taken for the districts of Terqa, Saggaratum, and Dur-Yahdun-Lim: the opposition between 'taking' omens and 'having' them taken clearly shows that Asqudum had inspected the liver in person (Figure 12.2). In the same letter he also ordered lambs to be sent quickly, manifestly so that he could continue to take omens. But at this same time he was also occupied with administrative affairs (Durand 1988: no. 51, mentioning Bannum) and political matters (see below on the deportation of the inhabitants of Suhu).

Most of Asqudum's letters that exclusively concern divination seem to date to Yasmah-Addu's time, with the exception of Durand (1988: no. 82), which perhaps dates to Zimri-Lim's reign. However, this letter concerns omens taken after a dream, according to standard procedure (Durand 1988: 456). The dreamer is called Yasim-Dagan; if he is Zimri-Lim's general, known elsewhere, the letter is very important. In fact Asqudum does not say that he has taken omens but rather that he has had them taken. He does the same in two other letters (Durand 1988: nos. 47 and 85). Jean-Marie Durand (1988: 74) concluded that Asqudum rarely functioned as a diviner after his promotion under Zimri-Lim. We could, however, explain these circumstances differently. Taking omens about a dream requires one to be with the person concerned or to have a lock of their hair (*šārtum*) and a fringe of their garment (*sissiktum*) available: that was undoubtedly

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not the case for Asqudum at the time of Yasim-Dagan's dream. Similarly, when Asqudum had omens taken concerning lower Suhu (Durand 1988: no. 47), he was obviously not on the spot and thus had to delegate the task to other diviners. Now, four letters dating to Zimri-Lim's reign can be added to the two cited above, which clearly allude to Asqudum himself taking omens, for instance after a column of ants appeared in the palace (Durand 1988: no. 242, certainly attributable to Šibtu: Durand 1988: 498; 2008a: 497, 521–522). Similarly, Asqudum indicates: 'I will take omens' at the time of the transport of an *alûm*-drum (Durand 1988: no. 17), and again, in the same context, 'I have purified (*uzakki*) four lambs for the journey' (Durand 1988: no. 20). In a military context he reports: 'I have "treated" the *ṣuppum*-lambs of Ka'alalum' (Durand 1988: no. 29). Finally, another document (Bottéro 1957: no. 101) shows that Asqudum took omens to help decide whether a certain Masiha should be recruited as a scribe; the text dates to the 5th year of Zimri-Lim's reign. All of these passages clearly show that Asqudum continued to act as a diviner during Zimri-Lim's reign. If he was not a member of the team of five diviners who 'treated' the lambs of all the officials before they took oath in the sixth month of Zimri-Lim's 2nd regnal year (Durand 1991: 36–46), that is surely because he had not yet arrived in Mari with Šibtu (see below). There is no reason to suppose that these five men—Zimri-Dagan, Erib-Sin, Šamaš-in-matim, Inib-Šamaš, and Dada—had replaced him as diviner. On the contrary, in a letter to Zimri-Lim, Erib-Sin indicates that he has not taken omens about a town in Suhu, according to Asqudum's orders (Durand 1988: no. 99; Charpin 1997: 352 n. 35).

In short, we should not differentiate too sharply between the two phases of Asqudum's life, imagining that he went from 'simple diviner' under Yasmah-Addu to 'politician' under Zimri-Lim. In the opposite direction, an early letter (Durand 1988: no. 4) already shows him plotting with Samsi-Addu, in which he denounces to the great king the conduct of three senior officials from Mari (Villard 2001: 27, 55). We do not know why he is reproving them: writing on this subject to Yasmah-Addu, one of the accused indicates only that he will submit a complete (oral) report on this matter when he has rejoined the king of Mari.

Asqudum's divinatory activities

Paradoxically, only eight of the 65 letters written by Asqudum concern divination (Durand 1988: nos. 81–88). But the dossier of 190 texts put together by Jean-Marie Durand (1988) includes, as well as the diviners' letters, many letters *about* diviners, so that the corpus of diviners' letters *stricto sensu* is more restricted than one might believe. Of the forty-two diviners inventoried (Durand 1988: 231–256), only eighteen sent letters, numbering a total of sixty-eight. Asqudum appears as one of the more prolific, with eight letters of divinatory content. We should understand that these divinatory letters are like prophetic texts, in that they are exceptional documents, written when the diviner could not report directly to the king activities during an audience, which clearly would

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leave no written evidence (Charpin 2002). The case of Erib-Sin is particularly eloquent: all his letters seem to have been sent during a single mission, in which he accompanied the army of Mari to Babylon (Charpin 1997: 351–352). But this is not a peculiarity of the correspondence of diviners and prophets; the same observation holds, for instance, for the minister Habdu-malik (Charpin 1988: 207–232).

Asqudum's eight letters show him carrying out his hepatoscopic responsibilities just as his colleagues habitually did. Asqudum was frequently called upon to travel in order to question the gods about different parts of the kingdom. A diviner normally had to be present to take omens concerning a particular town; it was only exceptionally that he could call on a substitute, a clod of earth (*kirbānum*) from the locality in question (Durand 1988: 41–43). Thus Asqudum travelled to ascertain the future of the towns of Saggaratum, Terqa, Ṣuprum, and Mari (Durand 1988: no. 88). Equally he went to Halabit, where he took omens over the course of a month (Durand 1988: no. 86); they turned out to be unfavourable and the diviner warned the king about troops who were passing through the area. He also interrogated the fates concerning messengers to be sent, and who were held back as long as the omens remained bad (Durand 1988: no. 87). People equally drew on his skills in cases of illness. When a woman close to Yasmah-Addu fell ill at Saggaratum (Durand 2000: no. 1259) the king of Mari charged Asqudum with diagnosing the origin of her sickness. The diviner obtained 'Hand of Eštar-of-Radan' as the response, and suggested that the woman go to Ekallatum to visit this goddess (Durand 1988: no. 83). Asqudum took omens also regarding another illness which was thought to have been caused by the god Sin, after a promise broken by Yasmah-Addu or his father Samsi-Addu (Durand 1988: no. 84; Sasson 1993).

Unlike some of his colleagues, Asqudum did not give the technical details of his consultations but only their results (the sole exception being Durand 1988: no. 88). There is only one letter which differentiates itself from routine divinatory correspondence (Durand 1988: no. 81): here, Asqudum reports to the king on the omens that he has taken following a lunar eclipse, which itself constituted a bad omen. Happily the hepatoscopy gave a favourable verdict for the king and the 'upper district' (*halṣum elûm*) where the diviner was currently stationed; he invited the king to take the omens for himself and the city of Mari, where he was residing. It is a rare witness to the attention paid to eclipses at that time (Durand 2008a: 495–496).

The diviners' activity consisted of taking omens in order to consult the gods by posing questions (*tāwītum*) before sacrificing a lamb (Lambert 2007). But they also had to examine the entrails of the animals sacrificed to the gods which had been offered by the king or by individuals, to see whether ominous signs appeared in them (one of the clearest letters in this regard is Durand 1988: no. 92). Asqudum thus indicates that '(signs of) "loss" (*nēkemtum*) never stop appearing in my lord's sacrifices (*nīqum*)' (Durand 1988: no. 87). Another letter (Durand 1988: no. 85) shows, besides, that Asqudum was familiar with the omens that appeared during the sacrifices of ordinary individuals (*muškēnum*) (Durand 1988: 225 n. b). That does not mean that he himself was involved in these sacrifices: he could have been kept informed by another diviner, as Šamaš-in-matim was by

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his 'son' Ibbi-Amurrum (Durand 1988: no. 109). This undoubtedly explains the fact that over a hundred records of expenditure of sheep were sealed by Asqudum (Lafont 1984; 1987; Durand 2008a: 506). This lot of 137 tablets, dating to early in Zimri-Lim's reign, accounts for expenditure of sheep for various occasions: for the 'king's table' (*paššūr šarrim*), that is, for the consumption of the king and his dining companions; for oracular consultations (*nēpešti mār bārê*); for sacrifices to deities, often named, and in various rituals (Nakata 1991); as presents for members of the royal family, dignitaries, foreign emissaries, etc. In total, the expenditures amount to 979 animals in a period of less than three months. An administrative text (Bottéro 1957: no. 244) gives us a summary, undoubtedly established at the end of that year: 1294 sheep were expended under Asqudum's responsibility. Almost all of these tablets were sealed by Asqudum. That is astonishing, as only a minority of these sheep were destined for 'the diviners' work' (*nēpešti bārî*) (Durand 1983: 30–31; Lafont 1984: 250–251).

The 'matrimonial mission' to Aleppo

Zimri-Lim continued to employ Asqudum as a diviner; but equally he charged him with many other missions. Several months after his enthronement, he sent Asqudum to Aleppo with his chief musician Rišiya to negotiate his marriage to Šibtu, a daughter of king Yarim-Lim. The dossier is very interesting but poses numerous interpretative difficulties, notably of chronology, since it covers about fifteen months (Durand 1988 should now be re-examined in the light of Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 191–193; Ziegler 2007: 87; 2010). Another problem arises from the fact that several years earlier Yasmah-Addu had married a princess from Qaṭna; several surviving letters might concern either event.

Rišiya, like Asqudum, had been in Yasmah-Addu's service; he must have been elderly, and disappears shortly after Zimri-Lim's marriage to Šibtu. It seems that on this mission Asqudum had precedence over him: in his letter (Durand 1988: no. 9), Rišiya names Asqudum before him and, in the three letters that they sent jointly, Asqudum's name comes first (Durand 1988: nos. 10–12). Similarly, the correspondence concerning Šibtu's journey from Aleppo to Mari mentions only Asqudum (Durand 1988: nos. 14 and 16). What entitled Asqudum to be chosen for such a mission to Aleppo? The answer is not as obvious as for Rišiya: the latter, as 'chief musician' (*nargallum*), had authority over the harem (see Ziegler, in this volume). It is thus not surprising that matrimonial missions were entrusted to chief musicians (Ziegler 2007: 11); Rišiya had also participated in the marriage of Zimri-Lim's sister Atrakatum to the Yaminite king Sumu-Dabi (Ziegler 2007: 87). Previously, under Yasmah-Addu, it was Samsi-Addu's chief musician, Ibbi-Ilabrat, who had been charged with going to fetch Dam-hurași from Qaṭna as the young king of Mari's bride (Ziegler 2007: 149–150). He had accompanied Sin-iddinam, who had carried the bridal gift (*terhātum*); unfortunately we are ignorant of this important personage's title, but he does not seem to have been a diviner (Villard 2001: 30–32). It is

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thus probable that Asqudum accomplished his 'matrimonial mission' more as a trustworthy senior official than as diviner.

We know that Asqudum left for the kingdom of Aleppo on 25/iv/ZL 1. Rišiya reports on the first stage of their mission in Durand 1988: no. 9: on their arrival in Aleppo they were very well received by the king Yarim-Lim. The minister Šimrum intervened in favour of their request; but Rišiya reports that there was a price for this intervention, namely a female singer to be sent from Mari. Rišiya thus urged that this Karanatum should arrive soon (Ziegler 1999a: 96). The negotiations advanced and Asqudum left again for Mari. No part of the dossier, as reconstructed to date, makes any allusion to the dowry that the king of Aleppo bestowed on his daughter.

The bridal gift (*terhātum*) that contemporary custom required Zimri-Lim to send to his future father-in-law was then assembled at Mari. Its inventory, dating to the tenth month of ZL 1, enumerates four chokers; medallions and brooches; valuable vases; numerous bolts of fabric; and concludes with cows and sheep (Limet 1986: no. 616; Durand 1988: 100–101). Asqudum conveyed all these goods to Aleppo, where it seems that Rišiya had remained meanwhile; we do not know how long this took. Accounts of oil from the end of Zimri-Lim's first regnal year have preserved traces of this mission of Asqudum's (Duponchel 1997: 211–212).

According to contemporary custom, the future husband had to go to the home of his bride's father to escort her to his own home; however, Zimri-Lim did not travel to Aleppo. New knowledge of the chronology of his reign now enables us to understand why: the Yaminites were on the point of revolting against him. We thus see a sort of 'procured marriage'. This is not the first case we know of: in the same way, Yasmah-Addu did not travel to Qaṭna to marry Dam-hurași, because of similar politico-military difficulties (Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 86). When Asqudum arrived in Aleppo, Yarim-Lim pushed for the marriage to be celebrated without delay, as his mother Sumunna-abi was gravely ill: in the event of her death, the ceremony would have to wait until the end of the mourning period (Charpin 2008a). As Asqudum and Rišiya told it (Durand 1988: no. 10), the marriage comprised two principal elements. First, Zimri-Lim's emissaries brought into Yarim-Lim's palace the gifts (*biblum*) sent by the king of Mari. Then they 'put the veils (*kutummū*) on the daughter' of the king of Aleppo, a symbolism known elsewhere to signify marriage (Démare-Lafont 2008). Two days later Yarim-Lim's fears were realized: his mother died. The king of Aleppo then informed his son-in-law's envoys that they could not take part in the funerary ceremonies and that they were to leave and tour the kingdom. Such a dismissal may have had tribal motivations; Asqudum and Rišiya complied despite their protestations. They returned two weeks later and gave presents to the king Yarim-Lim, his wife Gašera, and the young bride Šibtu, who was clearly still mourning her grandmother (Durand 1988: no. 11).

Before Šibtu's departure, her father became worried about where she would live on her arrival at Mari. Asqudum reported the matter to Zimri-Lim like this:

> Yarim-Lim challenged me, saying: 'I have heard say several times that the gods are powerful in the palace (of Mari): where, then, will my daughter's belongings go?' I said: 'Your daughter's apartment is excellent.' He: 'My daughter's belongings may

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> be placed in her apartment, but she should live with her husband, and leave for 5 or 6 days (a month) to live in her apartment.' (Durand 1988: no. 13; with collations in Durand 2004)

Clearly the king of Aleppo is alluding here to the problem of the periods of impurity associated with his daughter's menstruation (contra Heimpel 2003: 183 n. 1); Asqudum indicates elsewhere in this letter that he has reproduced exactly the king of Aleppo's proposal, which might suggest his embarrassment at the turn that the conversation had taken. Asqudum also insisted that a worthy house be prepared so that the king of Aleppo's envoys, who were to accompany Šibtu to Mari, could give a favourable report to their master. Yarim-Lim was not at all concerned about his daughter's future status; he must have known that Zimri-Lim's principal wife was then Dam-hurași. Indeed, on her arrival in Mari, Šibtu did not immediately have the title of 'queen' (Ziegler 1999a: 54–55).

We know that Asqudum left Mari to bring the *terhātum*-gift in month x/ZL 1. We do not know when the 'procured marriage' took place, but Zimri-Lim's envoys seem to have remained in the kingdom of Aleppo for over six months, since Šibtu did not arrive in Mari until after the middle of Zimri-Lim's 2nd regnal year. The palace archives record a delivery of cloth 'sent by Asqudum' on 5/xii/ZL 1 (Durand 2009: 222), which shows that he was still absent. If Šibtu was not brought to Mari immediately after the end of Sumunna-abi's mourning period, it was because of the political situation: during the winter of Zimri-Lim's 1st year, the Yaminites of the Euphrates valley rebelled. In month two of his 2nd year, Zimri-Lim destroyed the walls of two of their fortifications, Mišlan and Samanum (Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 191). That is the moment when Šibtu and Asqudum sent fabrics to Mari (Durand 2009: 225): they were clearly still in Aleppo.

Asqudum and Rišiya hoped to leave Aleppo very quickly after the 'sacrifice of *hiyārum*' (Durand 1988: no. 11), one of the major festivals in the cultic calendar of Aleppo, whose date in the Mari calendar is not known (Krebernik 2001: 158–159). The route between Aleppo and Mari was difficult, because of the climate and the political circumstances. We do not know how many people made up the nuptial escort (*hadaššum*, Durand 1988: no. 16, l. 11); apart from the Aleppans who were just to take her to Mari, Šibtu was accompanied by numerous followers who were to remain with her. According to contemporary custom, her nurse Zizi was probably included (Ziegler 1999a: 42). However, the minister Sammetar warned the king against the danger of letting the new queen and her followers travel in high summer, and recommended waiting another two weeks for the beginning of autumn (thus a departure between the 5th and 10th of the sixth month, Durand 1988: no. 14). The convoy left Aleppo for Emar (Imar); there they met the boats, which had been prepared in Tuttul (Durand 2000: no. 1013). Asqudum and Rišiya wrote to Zimri-Lim on the 10th (of the sixth month) to ask if it were preferable to take the new queen to Dur-Yahdun-Lim, Saggaratum, or Terqa (Durand 1988: no. 15); the reply seems to have been Dur-Yahdun-Lim. Asqudum had wanted Šibtu to stay close to the Euphrates, at Tilla-Zibim. The governor Sumu-hadu opposed this choice and decided that the queen must spend a night at Dur-Yahdun-Lim: this fortified town would keep her safe from a possible Yaminite attack while the boats remained in the port of

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Ganibatum. The following stages downstream must have been Zibnatum, Terqa, Ṣuprum, and finally Mari, where Šibtu probably arrived at the end of the sixth month.

Another mission to the west

Within the framework of his 'matrimonial mission' Asqudum went twice to Aleppo: to negotiate Zimri-Lim's marriage to Šibtu, and then to deliver presents and bring back the new bride. He had occasion to go to Aleppo once more, again to deliver gifts from Zimri-Lim (Durand 1988: 119–133; 2002: 31–32), particularly to transport a musical instrument (*alûm)*, a sort of giant bronze drum (Ziegler 2007: 74–76).

We do not know the date of this journey to Aleppo but it cannot have been either of those related to the 'matrimonial mission'. Asqudum describes the transport difficulties in detail to Zimri-Lim. He started his journey in the district of Saggaratum:

> I have assembled the bulk of my expedition at Tilla-Zibim. Leaving there, I will travel on barges. Once I have passed Lasqum, I will take omens and, in accordance with my omens, I will take the *alûm*-drum and the *kubbusum*-case and have (them) carried. I will put the children in chariots. In three days I shall reach Imar, in order to arrive three or for days before the *hiyārum* sacrifice. (Durand 1988: no. 17)

We know that upstream from Lasqum, the narrowness of the Euphrates valley made the haulage of barges impossible, hence the recourse to porters. The weight of the instrument was manifestly considerable:

> According to what was said in front of my lord: '8 men can carry the *alûm*-drum', 8 men lifted (it) but could not move it forward. 12 men lifted (it) but could not (move it forward). 16 men can carry it. (Durand 1988: no. 18)

Asqudum had many difficulties in getting the instrument as far as Tuttul, because of the extremely cold weather. Once there, the king of Aleppo's servants should have taken charge, directed by his Aleppan companion Hammu-Samar, but this man did nothing. Arriving at Emar, Asqudum estimated that he could reach Aleppo five days before the *hiyārum*-sacrifice (Durand 1988: no. 19). One last time, he stressed the difficulties that the instrument's transport had caused his men (Durand 1988: no. 20).

Diplomatic and military activities

The diviners' role in conflicts is clear: they assisted army chiefs in the decisions they had to take, questioned the gods on which routes to take, which stops to make, the course of battle, etc. In principle each military leader was assisted like this by one or two diviners (Durand 1988: 22–23). Asqudum's case appears atypical in this regard: he played an

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important role in various conflicts, not only by his diplomatic interventions but also because he took the head of military contingents in person (Durand 1988: 22–23). We see that in a letter on military affairs (Durand 1998: no. 633), which Asqudum dispatched with the general Yasim-Dagan, Asqudum's name appears first, which is not a diviner's normal position. Equally, during a siege we see Asqudum concerned with the delivery of wood to make ladders, and a metal spike intended for a battering ram (Durand 1988: no. 71-bis).

A first episode seems to date to the first months of Zimri-Lim's reign (Durand *apud* Charpin and Ziegler 2003: no. 4 n. 308). Zimri-Lim has just regained possession of Suhu, the Euphrates valley downstream from Mari, and has decided to deport the population from the southernmost part of the region and to repopulate it with Bedouins from his tribe (Haneans), led by one Ašmad. Asqudum, sent on a mission in the region, noted the population's concerns, roused by an agitator with the cry: 'The Haneans are coming to devour us!' (Durand 1988: no. 36, ll. 23–24). Indeed, some Bedouins dreamed only of booty (Durand 1988: no. 37; also Durand and Guichard 1997: 33). Asqudum and Ašmad insisted to Zimri-Lim that he come in person to Hanat, where the deported population had been assembled (Durand 1988: no. 38).

A further delicate mission was entrusted to Asqudum: negotiating with the Bedouins, who were guilty of a serious impiety (*asakkum*) (Durand 1988: 181–192). The letters in which Asqudum gives an account of his mission are unfortunately very allusive: the king understood the hints that the diviner wrote to him, but we are unaware of the nature of this obviously extremely serious misdemeanour. The Bedouins admitted their responsibility and Asqudum asked the king to send him *wāšipum*-exorcists and *mussirum*-purifiers (Durand 1988: no. 44), who were to wash the culprits of their sin. Asqudum prepared the meeting carefully, drawing aside those who could have caused trouble (Durand 1988: no. 45). It went so well that he was able to send a very positive report of the encounter (Durand 1988: no. 46).

The autumn of Zimri-Lim's third regnal year was marked by the start of a crucial conflict: the armies of Ešnunna attacked the region of Suhu. Zimri-Lim attempted to bring together the largest possible number of allies to face this invasion. Asqudum was thus sent on a mission to king Amud-pi-El of Qaṭna (Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 195). Asqudum was also to find an army corps in Terqa, which took longer than planned (Durand 1988: no. 26). Asqudum went to Manuhatan, where he convened the Bedouin army; he was then to find Zimri-Lim, who would join him with the army of the 'Banks of the Euphrates' at Qaṭṭunan (Durand 1988: no. 27). This meeting took place, unhappily for us: once Asqudum was with the king again, no further letters inform us of the continuation of the operations.

Asqudum took the role of Zimri-Lim's counsellor in important diplomatic matters; when he was absent, the king sent him a duplicate of the correspondence that he exchanged with other kings. Thus he sent Asqudum a copy of the letter that he had written to Amud-pi-El at Qaṭna (Durand 1988: no. 25). Similarly, we know thanks to Durand (1988: no. 40) that Zimri-Lim sent Asqudum a copy of a letter from Hammurabi concerning the town of Hit, which the Babylonian king desperately wished to recover; Asqudum allowed himself to treat these claims as 'excessive'.

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Administrative and commercial activities

Asqudum acquired various functions: as we have seen, at the beginning of Zimri-Lim's reign he obtained the post of *sugāgum*-mayor of Hišamta (Durand 1988: no. 5, cited above; for the *sugāgum* as mayor, see Charpin 2007a: 170–171). His position in the administration of the kingdom of Mari was very elevated thereafter, according to the lists of 'presents' sent to the king by high-ranking dignitaries (*wēdûtum*). Several such texts are headed by the 'prime minister' Sammetar, followed by Asqudum. Then come various individuals, whose order of enumeration varies: Hali-hadun, Yasim-Dagan, Aqba-ahum, Warad-ilišu, etc. (e.g. Guichard 2005: no. 47). This high hierarchical position is reflected in the very dry tone that Asqudum employs in his letters to the high-ranking administrator Mukannišum: they comprise brief orders, demanding that this or that commodity be sent (Durand 1998: no. 218; Durand 1988: nos. 70–71-bis).

Asqudum's correspondence on administrative matters comprises about thirty letters, of which a dozen are exchanged with various 'civil servants' (Durand 1988: nos. 50–80). Varied subjects are broached in his letters to the king: herds of cows and flocks of sheep; the collection of taxes in silver; garments for the king; the cultivation of the palace fields; the gathering in of harvests and rations for the harvesters. Enlil-ipuš asks Asqudum for instructions about plough-oxen that are inactive because of instability in the countryside around Dur-Yahdun-Lim (Durand 1988: no. 76). Equally, a letter from the governor of Qaṭṭunan shows that during an inspection of that district Asqudum had set the work-rates of the agricultural teams who were working royal land (Birot 1993: no. 1). We might be surprised that a diviner involved himself in economic questions of this kind, which might be thought to fall under the remit of the 'finance minister' (*šandabakkum*) (Maul 1997). On the contrary, this constant overlap between different spheres of responsibility is typical of the time. What counted above all was service to the king.

Asqudum used his various missions to the west by importing local products that were lacking in the Mari region. Thus he organized the sending of various trees from Aleppo to Mari, which were to be planted on their arrival (Durand 1988: no. 21; Lafont 1997). Another letter (Durand 1988: no. 22) announces that he will transport by boat from Emar to Mari all the goods that Zimri-Lim lacks, and which we would expect the king of Aleppo to present within the framework of gift-exchange characteristic of diplomatic relations of the time (Lerouxel 2002): 'cedar, cypress, *elamakkum*-wood, boxwood, copper, lead, and all other necessary things'. If the king of Aleppo were late in providing these things, Asqudum proposed to buy oil to a value of one mina of silver so that the six barges at Emar were not kept idle (Heimpel 2003: 188–189). Asqudum did not have this sum, but was intending to borrow it from merchants if necessary; to have money sent from Mari would have been a waste of time. This affair clearly shows that the exchange of presents between kings should be carefully distinguished from commercial transactions.

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Asqudum's household, retirement, and death

The remains of the archive found in the 'small eastern palace' at Mari allow us to identify its occupants. Thus a fragment of an envelope is addressed '[to] Asqudum' (Charpin 1985b: 455). Neither the corresponding tablet nor any other letter has been found in the building but, in general, envelopes of letters were opened in the home of their addressee. In addition, we find numerous texts of the type 'I have received from so-and-so' in which the name of recipient does not figure but there is the imprint of his seal; all such receipts are impressed with Asqudum's seal. It was therefore Asqudum who was master here. Certain texts designate him anonymously as 'the man' (*awīlum*), such as those concerning 'the man's meal' (*naptan awīlim*), which are the equivalent on a reduced scale of the 'king's meal' records in the palace (Charpin 1996: 222).

Apart from Asqudum and his wife Yamama, we find references to 'Kabi-Addu, son of Asqudum, servant of Zimri-Lim', as described by his seal (Figure 12.3; Beyer 1984). We do not know if Kabi-Addu was a son of Yamama, but it is unlikely. Asqudum's marriage to Yamama, if it took place during the reign of Yasmah-Addu, cannot have been earlier than the latter's installation at Mari: that does not give enough time for Kabi-Addu to have become adult by the start of Zimri-Lim's reign. But even if Asqudum had a wife before his marriage to Yamama, by Zimri-Lim's 2nd regnal year Yamama was his only spouse (Ziegler 1999a: no. 33, l. 15). Did Asqudum have other children? That is difficult to say: Enlil-ipuš calls himself Asqudum's 'son' in a letter (Durand 1988: no. 76) but that could simply be a mark of respect. Inibšina, *ugbabtum*-priestess of the god Addu, also lived in this house; known to be a daughter of Yahdun-Lim, she was thus Yamama's sister (Ziegler 1999a: 46–49).

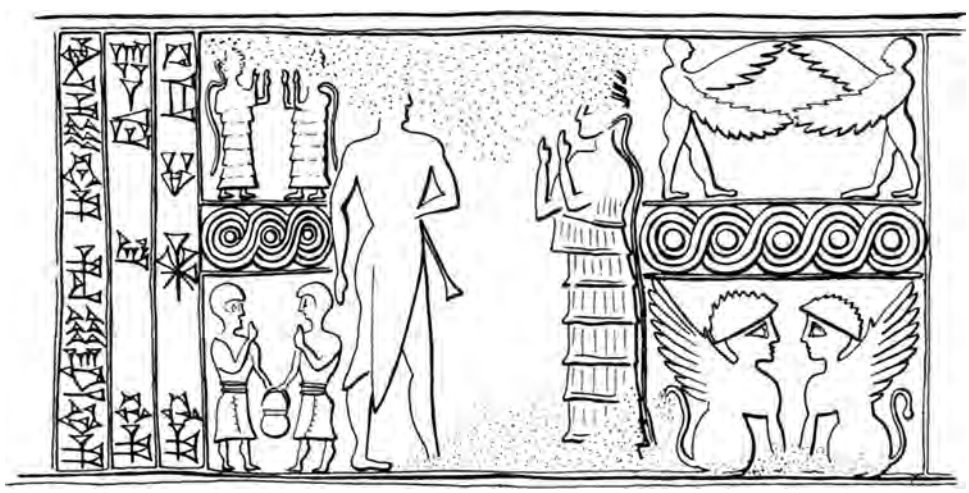

FIGURE 12.3 The cylinder seal of Kabi-Addu, son of Asqudum. (Drawing by D. Beyer, reproduced from Beyer 1984)

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The surviving household tablets principally concern two spheres of activity: primary products (grain, wool, and oil) and their processing on the one hand, and personnel management on the other. The house included a stable which housed the donkeys for the chariot which Asqudum used on his travels. But the picture is not complete: we do not possess, for example, a single text on the management of Asqudum's fields, although a letter (Durand 1998: no. 380) shows that he possessed plenty of land. Even if we should not take too seriously the figure of 1000 acres given by Ibal-pi-El, who was very angry when wrote this letter, other documents show the extent of his agricultural possessions (Koppen 2002: 330 n. 216). In another letter (Durand 1988: no. 74), Asqudum affects a detachment over the lands which he had received following the confiscation of the Yaminites' goods, which speaks clearly of his rapacity. We also get hints of Asqudum's wealth from various texts found in the palace, such as an inventory of seven silver vases which belonged to him (Guichard 2005: no. 266; cf. no. 266-bis). The inventories that were made of his house after is death allow us to partially reconstitute its contents, with its bronze tableware, wine reserves, etc. (Guichard 2005: no. 143).

A brief word should be said of the several scholarly texts found in this building, amongst which only a list of gods has been published to date (Lambert 1985). Their relation to the period when the building was occupied by Asqudum and his family is far from certain. But it is by no means impossible that Asqudum's house served as a base for teaching cuneiform writing, which Asqudum, like all other diviners of his time, was certainly able to read and write (Charpin 2004: 177; 2010: 16–17).

Why do we have so few tablets after Zimri-Lim year 3, even though Asqudum did not die until the start of year 8? It is very likely that the diviner had left Mari to live in a palace at Zurubban for the last five years of his life (Koppen 2002: 331 n. 220). One can imagine that, as he aged, he wished to retire away from the capital and its intrigues; not a single letter seems to date from his final years.

The letters that mention Asqudum's death by drowning seem to concern someone else with the same name who died relatively early in Zimri-Lim's reign (Durand 1988: 77–78). Asqudum is still attested in palace administrative texts dating to the middle of Zimri-Lim's 8th year; he seems to have died shortly afterwards. In the fourth month of year 9, in accordance with contemporary practice, palace officials made an inventory (*piqittum*) of the dead man's possessions, some of which were then returned to the palace (Durand 1998: 533–534). Asqudum's sister-in-law Inibšina recovered a part of his belongings (Ziegler 1999a: 47 n. 274; Koppen 2002: 330–331). This operation perhaps explains why some of his legal texts, such as a slave-purchase contract (Boyer 1958: no. 10) or a loan (Boyer 1958: no. 49), were found in the palace instead of remaining in the archives of his home.

Conclusions

Asqudum the diviner is one of the few officials from Mari—or perhaps of any Mesopotamian court—whose personality can be discerned fairly closely. What strikes us on reading his letters is his frequent concern for even the humblest: he emphasizes

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the efforts of his porters; he notices when his soldiers are cold (Durand 1988: no. 28) and claims oil for them (Durand 1988: no. 29); he stresses the anguish of the deported inhabitants of Suhu (Durand 1988: no. 38). But he was by no means an innocent: he did not hesitate to denounce the conduct of certain high-ranking officials to Samsi-Addu, nor to qualify the remarks of Hammurabi of Babylon as 'lies' (Durand 1988: no. 40). These human qualities could help to explain why Zimri-Lim entrusted him with delicate diplomatic missions, but also why some approached Asqudum to intercede in their favour with the king of Mari (Durand 1988: no. 39). We should not, however, paint an idealized portrait of his character: he also managed his material interests with great acumen.

We would be wrong to believe that Asqudum constitutes an exceptional case. He was not the only diviner of the Old Babylonian period who had such a remarkable career: we could compare him to Aqba-Hammu, for instance (Charpin 1985b: 457–458). Just like Asqudum, this diviner in the service of the king of Karana married a princess, Iltani. Just like Asqudum, he aligned himself with the new power when the political situation changed: he seems in fact to have abandoned his king, Asqur-Addu, for Hammurabi of Babylon, on whose account he then administered the former kingdom of Karana (Charpin 1985b: 457; 1989; Eidem 1989).

We see then that there are several possible versions of Asqudum's story. According to Jean-Marie Durand, it is above all because he was king Zimri-Lim's brother-in-law that Asqudum found himself entrusted to important missions: it was not his position as diviner as such that allowed him to 'climb the ladder' (Durand 1988: 6). For Jack Sasson, Asqudum is typical of those diviners who, once they had succeeded in penetrating the centre of power, 'stopped bloodying their hands' (Sasson 1998a: 117). It seems to me, however, that both interpretations minimize Asqudum's divinatory activities in the final phase of his active life: just as scribes could accede to the highest responsibilities of the state and continue to write, diviners could be close counsellors to the king without ceasing to question the gods to try and understand the fate of their enterprises and interpret the signs that they sent.

Further reading

The texts of the royal archives of Mari are published in the series Archives Royales de Mari (31 volumes, 1948–) and Florilegium Marianum (11 volumes, 1992–), with detailed commentaries. Heimpel (2003) offers a selection of 766 letters in English translation (cf. the review Charpin 2005/6). Charpin and Ziegler (2003, in French) is an analysis of the political history of the Mari period while Sasson (1998b) offers a good introduction to king Zimri-Lim and his times. For the Old Babylonian period in general see Charpin, Edzard and Stol (2004, in French and German). Durand (1988) provides the edition of Asqudum's letters (in chapter 1, pp. 69–228) as well as a detailed study of the diviners in Mari. A useful general introduction to divination is Maul (2007) while Westbrook (2005) provides a general discussion of patronage in the ancient Near East. Charpin (2007b) explores how letters were written, sent, and read in the Mari age.

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CHAPTER 13

LEARNED, RICH, FAMOUS, AND UNHAPPY: UR-UTU OF SIPPAR

MICHEL TANRET

What do we know about the life of Ur-Utu, chief dirge singer (or chief lamenter, *galamāhum*) of the goddess Annunitum and one of the most prominent citizens of Sippar-Amnanum? What do we know about his education, his interests, and his aspirations?[1]

His house was excavated by the Belgian Archaeological Mission to Iraq under the direction of Leon De Meyer and Hermann Gasche (Gasche 1989). The archive it contained turned out to be particularly rich and important: comprising 2500 tablets, it is the largest private Old Babylonian archive ever found. It was excavated so meticulously that we know not only in which layers and rooms the tablets were found but also how they were grouped within these rooms. Such precision in excavating and reporting enables us to reconstruct the circumstances in which the archive was abandoned by its last owner, Ur-Utu, as well as the processes by which it was formed.

Perhaps paradoxically, although Ur-Utu's rich and well-documented archive provides unique insights in social and economic life during the second half of the Old Babylonian period, it does not provide us with much direct information about Ur-Utu as a person. The archive contains contracts and administrative texts documenting his economic activities and those of his family, but this does not tell us much about him. The more than 200 letters in the same archive look more promising at first sight, but these were

[1] Names of Old Babylonian kings are abbreviated as follows: Sm = Sin-muballiṭ, Ha = Hammurabi, Si = Samsu-iluna, Ae = Abi-ešuh, Ad = Ammi-ditana, Aṣ = Ammi-ṣaduqa.

Di (= Der inscriptions) numbers refer to unpublished texts from the Ur-Utu archive, unless otherwise stated. Some Di letters cited are taken from the unpublished PhD thesis by Caroline Janssen (Janssen 1993), whom I thank for permission to quote. A Di number cited alone relates to a tablet not in Janssen's thesis.

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almost all sent to him by other people, and there are only a few copies of letters he sent; as they mostly concern economic matters, or allude to situations we do not otherwise know about, the letters are also of little help to us.

But although we have no direct access to the information we want, we will see there are some indirect and unexpected ways to lift part of the veil that time has spread over the person of Ur-Utu. We will proceed from an attempt at a simple biography and reach out on every possible occasion from there to his intellectual undertakings, his hopes, and his fears.

Yahrurum origins

Ur-Utu was born into a family long involved with priestly prebends, or rights to temple income, involving a number of days of the dirge singer (*gala*)-ship of the goddess Inana of Sippar-Yahrurum. His known ancestry goes back six generations, to the reign of Apil-Sin (1830–1813 BC). The priestly functions also originate from that time. His family had always lived in Sippar-Yahrurum but Ur-Utu's father, Inana-mansum, moved to Sippar-Amnanum, a sister town some 5 kilometres away, when he became a chief dirge singer—the first of his family—in the 1st year of king Ammi-ditana (1683 BC).

Moving to Amnanum and moving in Amnanum

Inana-mansum stayed in his first house in Sippar-Amnanum for twenty-eight years (1683–1655) and then bought a group of smaller houses, had them demolished, and built a completely new and much larger one in their place (Janssen et al. 1994). This was a typical but sizeable Old Babylonian house of 193.75 m^2, with a central court of about 35 m^2 surrounded by nine rooms (Gasche 1989). There probably was only a ground floor. After twenty-seven years, in 1628, he rebuilt it. Some rooms received new floors and three rooms were added at the back, enlarging the house to 250 m^2. This was not a small house, but the materials used for its construction, in particular the foundations and the brickwork, were of poor quality. We may have expected better for the dwelling of the highest priest in town.

Although the rebuilding might have been necessary because of the poor quality of the building materials, the reason for adding the rooms was to create a larger space for the archive. This had been kept in one of the smaller rooms opening onto the courtyard, with a floor area of just under 10 m^2. The newly created archive room was nearly double this size at just under 19 m^2. The fact that there were two archive rooms in the house is important in relation to the place where the archival tablets were found. We will come back to this later, after a look at the family troubles between Inana-mansum's sons.

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The dead

The house was not only a place for the living but it was also the last resting place for the deceased members of the family (Gasche 1989: 65–66). The number of graves under the house indicates that child mortality must have been relatively high, which is not surprising. The gender of the deceased is interesting: four of the five adults were women, a fact that fits in well with the high rate of newborn and infant deaths. It is tempting to identify the older man buried under the old archive room with Inana-mansum, Ur-Utu's father, who died in the house. However, as Hermann Gasche already noted, this poses a problem since we know that Inana-mansum's career lasted forty-two years while anthropological study of the bones indicates that the remains are of a man of up to the age of 50. We would tend to discount this estimate and consider this to be Inana-mansum. The grave in itself is not of particularly high quality, although it is a vault tomb, but it has quite a number of grave gifts, including ox and sheep or goat meat (now only bones), some of which were even deposited in the pit outside the tomb. These features make it exceptional among the graves under the house.

During the rebuilding and the rearrangement of the archive, the house burnt down, never to be rebuilt or revisited. This final occupation phase lasted only five months (Tanret 2001) and, surprisingly enough, in that short span of time no fewer than nine individuals were buried under the house. All of them are newborns or babies up to a year and a half, except for a boy of about 11. As Gasche (1989: 66) noted, this implies that three or four women reached the end of their pregnancies within a very short timespan. Epidemics or malnutrition, the causes of death proposed by Gasche (who reckoned on sixteen months for this phase), seem all the more probable now that we know they took place in just five months. There must have been hardship towards the end.

But let us first turn to happier times.

Ur-Utu is born

Inana-mansum had married a woman from Babylon, Ilša-hegalli, who was a *qadištum*-priestess. Their first son was probably Ur-Utu. As we will see further on, Ur-Utu may have been in his early teens around 1651 BC. This would put his date of birth around 1661, in Ad 23, twenty-three years after his father moved to Sippar-Yahrurum and six years before he had his new house built. He disappeared in Aṣ 18 (1629) at the age of 32. If we assume that his father Inana-mansum was about 20 when he became chief dirge singer and moved to Amnanum in Ad 1 (1683) he would have been born in 1703 BC, which corresponds to Ae 9. (His father, Marduk-naṣir, is attested under Samsu-iluna, r. 1749–1712). He would have had Ur-Utu at a rather late age, when he was 42.

Ur-Utu had a sister, Lamassani, and three brothers, Kubburum, Huzalum, and Ili-iqišam. This could have been a well-to-do and happy family, but it was not and there were reasons for that.

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Trouble in the family

After a forty-one-year career, at the end of 1643 (Aṣ 4), Inana-mansum handed over his role as chief dirge singer, head of the main temple of Sippar-Amnanum, to his son Ur-Utu and donated a number of fields and house plots to him (for a full account of this section, see Janssen 1992). The fact that Ur-Utu was already receiving (part of) his inheritance provoked the jealousy of his three brothers, who also claimed their shares. Inana-mansum refused to give them anything during his lifetime, infuriating them even more. Then, as so often in those times, they tried to invoke the help of a higher authority. When an influential person visited Sippar-Yahrurum he was offered golden earrings belonging to one of the brothers' wives as a bribe in exchange for interceding with Inana-mansum. The latter's answer was most surprising, at least according to Ur-Utu (not the most objective witness in this matter but there is no other), who cites his father's words in a letter. According to him Inana-mansum said:

> To whom should I divide my inheritance? This Kubburum, he is the son of Warad-Mamu, a servant of Esangila-mansum, the [*text broken*] Ili-iqišam is the son of a sister of the daughter-in-law of Ku[…]ia and Huzalum is the son of a (female) tenant of the house of a slave of the sanga-priest of Zarpanitum. I will not leave my inheritance to them. Ur-Utu has received my sceptre [= he is my heir]. I will leave everything to him. (Janssen 1992: 24–25)

Even if we may suppose there is some exaggeration here, especially where Ur-Utu claims that his father wanted to make him sole heir, the remarks about the brothers not being Inana-mansum's children must be taken seriously. As Lucile Barberon (2005) has convincingly shown, since Inana-mansum's wife was a *qadištum*-priestess, it is probable that although she could marry she was not allowed to bear children, which means they were all adopted. Starting from the idea that none of these children were children of Inana-mansum's wife, Barberon hypothesizes that when Inana-mansum refers to their father they are not his children either, but when he refers only to a mother he might well be the father himself, the mothers being secondary wives he may have had. This leads then to the conclusion that Kubburum was adopted by Inana-mansum and his wife and that Ur-Utu, Huzalum, and Ili-iqišam (probably in that order) were sons of Inana-mansum with secondary wives. This confirms our earlier conclusion that Ur-Utu was Inana-mansum's eldest son and thus the heir to his title.

This also fits well in with the fact that Kubburum (the only son who was completely adopted) was the most vehement concerning the inheritance, no doubt because he felt his position to be least assured. He managed to persuade his 'brothers' (since they had received nothing from their father either) to manipulate their father into giving them their shares and to litigate against Inana-mansum's wife for the property she had received from him (Janssen 1992: 24–25, 35–36). However, we sadly note that, notwithstanding the fact that one brother was adopted and the three others had different mothers, all of them are simply referred to as 'sons of Inana-mansum and his wife' in many texts of the archive, a historian's nightmare.

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Inana-mansum's disinheritance threat was in fact only that, because further information shows that after Inana-mansum's death his property was divided among his sons. Indeed, a little further on in the same letter, Ur-Utu states that the brothers have divided the inheritance, except for a house in the sister town Sippar-Yahrurum, where the family had lived until Inana-mansum moved to Sippar-Amnanum. This house had been sealed but, still according to Ur-Utu, the brothers had broken into it and stolen goods that had been kept there: 1200 litres of oil, fine clothes, copper cauldrons. Altogether the haul was worth 10 minas of silver, about 5 kilos—quite a sum, the approximate price of 50 ha of fields or several houses in town. Again, in view of the fact that this information comes from a letter in which Ur-Utu complains about how he was wronged by his brothers, we may have to take it with a grain of salt. As if this were not enough, still according to Ur-Utu, his brothers broke into the house a second time and took everything that was left, down to the hairpins and pestles. Ur-Utu then asks his intercessor to speak to a very important person in the capital city, Babylon, and persuade him to have the brothers arrested and brought to the capital to be judged and condemned.

As already mentioned, Inana-mansum's wife also had to suffer the attacks from three of her sons. Inana-mansum had given her some property as a gift from husband to wife. When he died, the three—Kubburum, Ili-iqišam, and Huzalum—started litigation against her. Again, they felt that a part of their rightful inheritance had been taken away. Again, a higher official was approached and bribed (Janssen 1992: 35–36). A supplementary difficulty for the mother was that she had lost the sealed document stipulating the gift. Officials came to Ur-Utu's house, where his mother was living, examined the property deeds, and concluded that she had indeed rightfully received the gift from her husband.

So finally, after years of dispute and lawsuits, all was well that ended well: Ur-Utu became chief dirge singer and received a large part of his inheritance at the same time, while his father was still living. The brothers protested and lost but finally got their share of the inheritance after their father died. All seemed to be going well for Ur-Utu.

Ur-Utu, the man

The chief dirge singer was a very important person in his local community of Sippar-Amnanum but it is clear that the sanga-priests of the Ebabbar, Šamaš's temple in Sippar-Yahrurum, were more important (Harris 1975: 187; Charpin 1988: 28–30, text HG 96). When the chief dirge singer was involved in a lawsuit with his brothers they referred to higher authorities who resided in Babylon or travelled around. They offered bribes and asked intermediaries to approach high officials in their favour (Janssen 1992: 24–26). Social networks were of the utmost importance. The chief dirge singer had relations in Babylon who interceded with the higher authorities there. They seem to have had relatively few dealings with their fellow citizens; or at least, they are much more sparsely documented.

As the future head of the local temple Ur-Utu was no doubt inducted orally by his father into the Annunitum cult and the meaning of its various rituals. In written form we

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only have the 'bookkeeping' aspect of the cult, concerning the management of rations and the produce left over from the execution of the rites (Tanret and Van Lerberghe 1993). Ur-Utu had the authority to organize rites of Annunitum, which were performed by many individuals, mainly but not exclusively women. This performance was lucrative for the chief dirge singer because the remains of these cultic activities (silver, beer, bread, and flour) were due to him, but it was also desirable from the performer's point of view. In Ur-Utu's archive we find a number of letters in which higher-ranked persons ask or command the chief dirge singer to accept people of their entourage for the rites. The granting of these requests no doubt gave Ur-Utu some leverage among the high and mighty.

Wealth

As an indication of Ur-Utu's wealth we take the example of his ownership of fields. We have to look behind the data to get a more accurate picture. Ur-Utu owned quite a number of fields in many agricultural districts in the Sippar region. Some of these he had inherited from his father. According to one text from the archive, his father had bequeathed 8.28 ha (1 *bur* and 5 *iku*) to him during his lifetime (Di 932, Janssen 1992: 37). We know he owned much more than that. We can calculate the area he must have owned or managed on the basis that he paid an annual tax of 82.3.4.0 *gur* or nearly 25,000 litres of barley. One text from the archive gives the equivalence 6 *gín* (54 g) of silver = 6 *gur* (1800 litres) of barley, the *biltum*-tax on 1 *bur* (6.48 ha) of field (Di 837).[2] This allows us to calculate that the 24,820 litres he paid every year was the tax on nearly 14 *bur*, or almost 90 ha of land.

There is no document in the archive showing that Ur-Utu owned or managed any fields other than his own, and there is no indication that he managed the fields of the Annunitum temple (if these existed at all). That leaves us with a bit of a mystery as to where all these fields came from. It is true that the archive contains a sizeable real estate section but it certainly does not document the acquisition of a total of more than 80 ha of land. We also must take into account that what we have calculated so far is just the tax he had to pay on these fields. The real yield must have been higher. Some texts also show that even on the taxes he had to pay Ur-Utu made a profit: he lent the barley to a third party before it went to its destination. In Di 946, for instance, silver and barley owed by him are lent to another person who will, at the time of the harvest, pay the taxes due. Whatever the case, Ur-Utu must have been a wealthy man.

Education

Not only was Ur-Utu a wealthy and respected citizen of Sippar-Amnanum, he was also an educated person. In the open courtyard of his house there was an installation typical for the teaching of cuneiform writing. This was a so-called tablet bin made of large bricks

[2] Other texts count 7 or even 8 *gur* per *bur*.

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laid flat, surrounded by standing ones, to make a more or less waterproof container filled with exercise tablets and purified clay. New tablets could be made out of the old ones or with the clay reserve as required by the teaching process. Since previous exercises were thrown away and not all re-used, examples of all stages of the learning process could be retrieved archaeologically.

As we have shown elsewhere, we can formulate a hypothesis as to the identity of the teacher and the student (Tanret 2002). The bin and its contents belong to the stratigraphical level IIId. This is the first occupational phase of the house, to be dated from Ad 29 (1655) to Aṣ 18 (1629), a period of twenty-six years. These are the last twelve years of Inana-mansum's chief dirge singership and almost the entire career of his son, who continued to live in the same house after him. The presence of the bin shows that, somewhere within this timespan, someone learned to write. After IIId no further training took place; the whole courtyard and bin were covered by a new floor.

The exercise tablets that were found allow us to conclude that this was no general or repeated training but the education of a single person. It must be stressed that this training took place not in what could be called a 'school', nor even the house of a scribe. This was the house of a chief dirge singer. We can conclude that the person who was educated here was someone who lived in the house. A further important point is that the exercises still present in the bin or around it represent most of the phases of the elementary curriculum. The most obvious candidate for this one person receiving an elementary scribal training is Ur-Utu. Is this chronologically possible?

The archaeological data provide us with a twenty-six-year timespan as we saw above: the last twelve years of Inana-mansum (1655–1643), and then fourteen years (1643–1629) of chief dirge singership for his son Ur-Utu. We can safely assume that when Ur-Utu inherited his father's title at the very end of Aṣ 4 (1643) his learning days were over. He had mastered what he needed to know of writing and reading and had no doubt also received the necessary chief dirge singer training from his father.

Our time frame for his scribal education is thus shortened to twelve years (1655–1643), which is still much too long. We have a way of reducing it further by reflecting on who the teacher might have been. This must have been a professional scribe and one of these, Šumum-liṣi, worked quite often for Inana-mansum and later for Ur-Utu himself. His name was found on many of the tablets from their archive, which implies that he was frequently in the house and could have undertaken the scribal education of Inana-mansum's son and successor. Šumum-liṣi is mentioned for the first time in the archive in Ad 33 (1651) so we suppose that his teaching started after this, narrowing the time frame to eight years, between Ad 33 (1651) and Aṣ 4 (1643). If we suppose that Ur-Utu was in his early teens when he learned to read and write, he would have been born in Ad 23 (1661).

What precisely did Ur-Utu learn? The first exercises consisted of familiarizing oneself with the clay, which had been purified to eliminate all intrusive elements like small pebbles and splinters of reed or wood. This clay had then to be kneaded and shaped into a tablet. Different shapes of tablets prepared in such a way, but without any

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writing, attest to this stage (Tanret 2002: 125–127). Then the apprentice had to be trained in the manipulation of the stylus, in all probability held between the thumb and the index finger, within the palm of the hand. The only interesting archaeological objects found in the same layer of Ur-Utu's house as the exercise tablets is a collection of small bone objects that have been identified as writing styli. First impressions were made in the clay, always in threes according to the tablets found: a vertical, a horizontal and a wedge, corresponding to the three basic positions of the stylus for writing any cuneiform sign.

From there on a list of simple signs was copied, traditionally called Syllable Alphabet A by Assyriologists. This list of about 126 lines was no doubt learned by heart and copied over and over. In the examples of Ur-Utu's first attempts at this excerise, it becomes clear how difficult it is to impress the basic lines in such a way that they form a single sign. Often the signs have an 'exploded' look, not achieving the required unity. Some transitional tablets were also found, combining Syllable Alphabet A either with the very first stylus manipulations or the subsequent exercise: the first syllabary. This was a much longer list, of over 400 lines, now called Syllabary A. The aim was now not only to learn how to form more and more signs but also to learn their phonetic values by heart, sometimes with more than one value for the same sign. The teaching was based on repetition and learning by heart.

In the tablet bin only one clear example is attested of the next stage, which was the combination of several signs to make personal names. This must have been very useful for Ur-Utu when searching through his archive but also for reasons of family tradition, as we shall see further on.

The next documented step is the copying of lexical lists. These were very long lists with thematically grouped nouns referring to real-world objects. The exercises that were found were extracts of the list of reeds, pots, skins, and metal objects; of the list of stones, plants, fish, birds, and clothes; of the list of geographical names and terminology and stars; of the list of foods and drinks. With these exercises Ur-Utu learnt to write and read words, often including logograms, and learnt their meaning. He was taught that certain words should be written in a certain way. Within this phase the first exercises consisted in copying on the right half of a large tablet the lines written by the teacher on the left half. Later, the apprentice could write parts of the list in several columns, under dictation or all by himself.

Mathematics was an important part of the curriculum (Robson 2008). Metrological lists, enumerating the different units from small to large, and tables incorporating a conversion into the sexagesimal positional system in order to facilitate calculations were taught. No examples of actual calculations were found, although Ur-Utu must have learnt the basic mathematical operations. More advanced mathematics was probably not included in his training. One fragment was found of a list including Sumerian formulas used in the writing of contracts. This too would have doubtless come in handy for the chief dirge singer.

How does this all fit in to the larger scribal curriculum? Niek Veldhuis (1997: 63) distinguished four phases of the elementary scribal study curriculum in the Old Babylonian

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city of Nippur. The first comprises the acquisition of writing techniques such as the handling of stylus and clay, the writing of simple signs, and the writing of personal names. The second consists of the writing and learning by heart of the so-called thematic lists, list of nouns designating trees, wooden objects, reeds, vessels, leather, metal objects, animals, meats, stones, plants, fish, birds, garments, geographical names, stars, and foodstuffs. The third is represented by metrological lists and tables, advanced lists, Sumerian readings of signs, thematic-acrographic, compound signs. The fourth is introductory Sumerian with model contracts and proverbs. The advanced curriculum consists of literary texts. In the chief dirge singer's house the surviving scribal exercises all belong to this elementary curriculum, within which the first three phases are particularly well represented (cf. Robson 2001).

An important question for our investigation is what this elementary education meant for Ur-Utu's intellectual development. A first and evident point is that it made him stand out among his contemporaries. During the Old Babylonian period knowledge of reading and writing seems to have been limited to a small number of people. Dominique Charpin (2008: 31–51) has convincingly shown that it was not exclusively the domain of the professional scribes but that the elite, higher temple office holders, palace administrators, and even higher military officers could at least read and in many cases also write simple texts and letters. As he shows, fewer than 100 cuneiform signs sufficed for this. The archive of the chief dirge singers adds weight to Charpin's point that an elementary form of literacy could have been dispensed to non-scribes. A slight problem seems to be that although a limited curriculum could be sufficient, there is no trace of an adapted curriculum for this 'light' form of cuneiform teaching. As is clear from Ur-Utu's apprenticeship, the traditional scribal training had to be painstakingly worked through even to retain only these hundred signs. Whichever way we look at it, scribal training was hard.

It is certain that there were practical reasons for this non-professional scribal education. These were the people who exercised control over society and it would not have been wise for them to leave all of the written aspect of this to specialists. There could also have been another dimension, in the sense of Bourdieu and Passeron's notion of 'cultural capital' (1970; cited in Veldhuis 1997: 143): the idea that a number of intellectual qualifications are generated by the family and the school. These tend to fix and perpetuate social elites and in doing so are a source of power. This is certainly pertinent for a traditional society like Mesopotamia. In Ur-Utu's case this means that, apart from the practical benefits, his even elementary knowledge of reading and writing reinforced his élite social standing.

The archive itself illuminates another and quite unexpected value of the written record for the chief dirge singers. First and foremost it is a collection of economic, administrative, and juridical documents, written proofs which had to be kept and produced in case of legal claims against the family. A certain group of documents, however, shows that there was another reason to keep old deeds. To find out more about this we will now take a look at Ur-Utu's archive.

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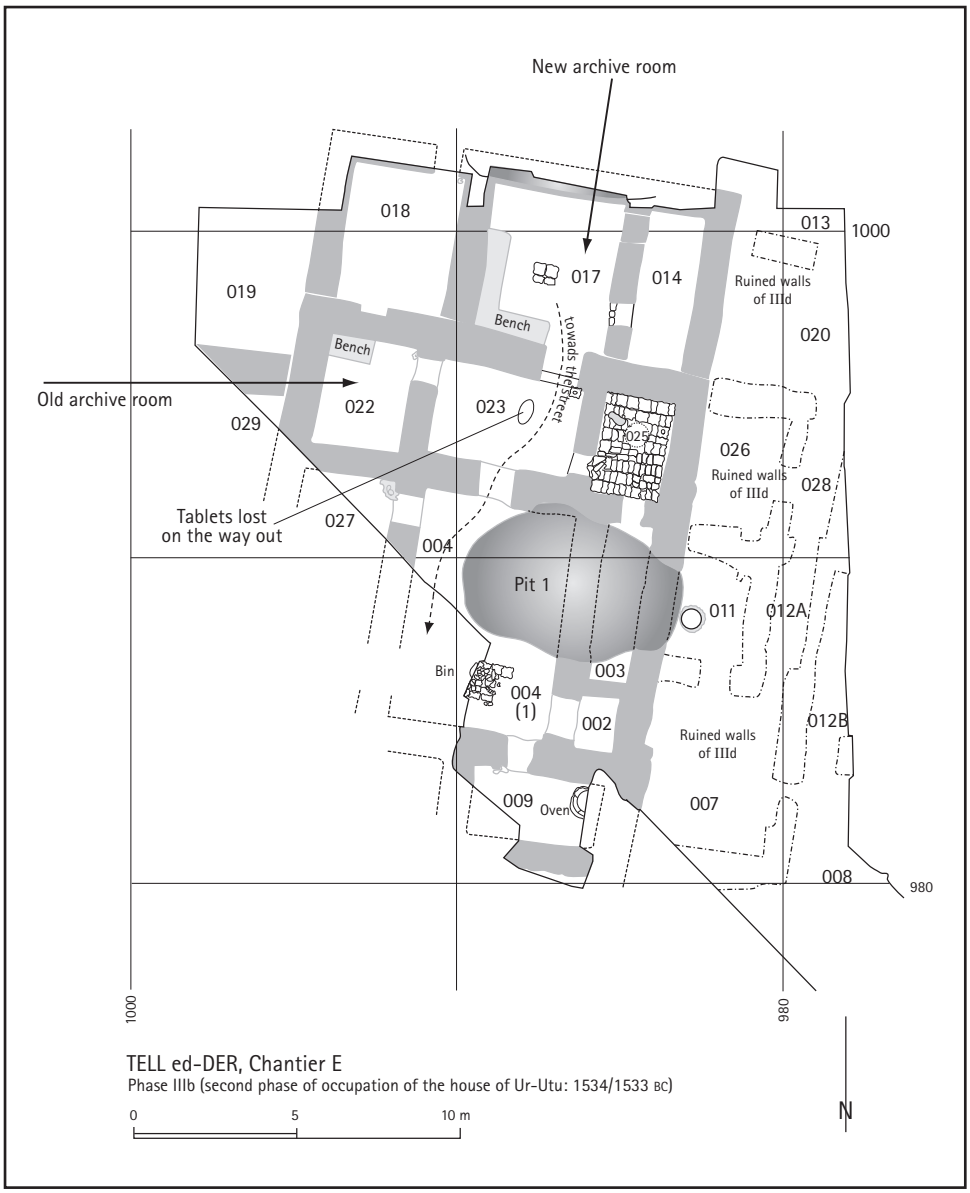

FIGURE 13.1 When Ur-Utu's house was on fire, the way out. (Reproduced from Gasche 1989: pl. 12.1)

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The archive

The archive was preserved *in situ* because a catastrophe struck the house of the chief dirge singer in Aṣ 18 (1629): a fire, which made the inhabitants flee with their possessions including some tablets. Some were dropped on their way out, leaving a trail of tablets in the courtyard (Figure 13.1). This catastrophe happened while the archive rooms were in the middle of being rearranged. The original archive room, locus 22, had become a temporary storage room and a number of tablets had already been moved to the new and much larger room, locus 17.

The archive contains a number of older tablets, dating from before the family's move from Yahrurum to Amnanum. This can only mean that Inana-mansum moved them from one town to the other. As far as they are preserved, none of these tablets bear his name. This is a first (sub)archive. While Inana-mansum lived in his first house in Amnanum his archive was enriched with new tablets. This is a second (sub)archive. When he moved to his new house in Ad 29 (1655) he took with him the tablets that he had brought from Sippar-Yahrurum and, no doubt after filtering and discarding, some of those that had entered his archive when he lived in his first house, from Ad 1 to Ad 28. The third (sub)archive comprises tablets that were written in the family's third and final house before the fire struck: Inana-mansum's tablets from Ad 29 to Aṣ 4 and tablets of Ur-Utu from Aṣ 4 to 18. In all, we can conclude, there are three layers in this archive, which can be chronologically distinguished.

A very special group of tablets

Among the different heaps of tablets in the old archive room 22 there is one that stands out (for a detailed discussion see Tanret 2008). This is group L, still stacked in such a way that it must have originally been contained in a (reed) box, whereas in all the other groups the tablets were just heaped up (Figure 13.2). The implication is that this group was special. It soon turned out that these were no property deeds or otherwise economically important tablets.

A small group of sixty-three tablets from this special box were brought by Inana-mansum from Sippar-Yahrurum, from his father's archive, to Sippar-Amnanum, to his first house. Quite surprisingly, these documents never mention Inana-mansum's name, they do not relate to any property he inherited, and most of them—if not all—were many years out of date. What then could have prompted him to take precisely these documents?

The oldest document in the box is a tablet dated to Hammurabi 3 (1790) concerning silver to be returned to two members of the family, four generations before Inana-mansum (Di 1911). It is the oldest tablet of the archive mentioning members of the family. This tablet must have entered the archive at the time it was written. For the last of the archive's owners, Ur-Utu, this tablet went back five generations. Each generation had carefully kept and transmitted this document which in the meantime had become economically useless. When the archive was brutally terminated by fire in Aṣ 18 it still contained this tablet, which by then had reached the venerable age of 161.

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FIGURE 13.2 The tablets from the special box in Ur-Utu's house. (Reproduced from Gasche 1989: pl. 14.2,)

Thirty tablets of this group are dated to Hammurabi's successor, Samsu-iluna, and all share two characteristics. The first is that all of them mention one or more members of the previous generations of Inana-mansum's family. The second is that by the time Inana-mansum took them to Amnanum, they too had lost their economic value. To be sure, there are other Samsu-iluna documents in the archive but, whereas all the others concern the transfer of real estate, none of the ones in the box do. This is a very clear-cut distinction, but how to explain the conservation of non-real-estate documents over such a long period of time? The real-estate documents were of course kept as proofs of ownership. As for those in the box, we can see no other reason for their presence in the archive until its end under Ammi-ṣaduqa than that they preserve the names and family relations of the members of Inana-mansum's family. They allow him (and us) to reconstruct (a sizeable part of) his family tree, reaching further back than human memory and being destined to be kept and transmitted to further generations until fire put an untimely stop to this process.

Among the documents in the box dated to the period of Inana-mansum's first house in Sippar-Amnanum, there are five written for Inana-mansum which entered his archive on the date they were written: Ad 1, 3, and 20. Not only were they kept until Ad 29 when Inana-mansum left his first house but they were transported, no doubt in this box, together with the older family mementoes, to his new house. Why were precisely these documents chosen to be kept in this group, more precisely selected to be in this box, while many others were doubtless thrown away?

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The answer is that all of them had some special meaning. One is the oldest consignment document in the archive. It concerns 2 shekels (*c.* 16.6 g) of silver handed over to a woman who has to transmit it to someone else (the text is damaged in several places). Another is Inana-mansum's oldest purchase of an ox. A third and fourth form a couple: the last payment of the IGI.SÁ tax due by the dirge singers and the first in which Inana-mansum pays his due to the storehouse of Sippar-Amnanum as a *chief* dirge singer. In other words, this couple marks the important promotion the family had been hoping for. The last one confirms this. It is a very normal, run-of-the-mill loan, one of the four hundred loans in the archive. What makes it stand out is that it has the very first written mention of Inana-mansum and adds his title 'chief dirge singer'. His promotion to head of Annunitum's temple in Sippar-Amnanum had not been marked by a royal edict or any other written proclamation, so if he wanted a memento of his nomination he had to preserve a simple loan (which he may have taken out for this very purpose) on the first day of the 1st year of the reign of king Ammi-ditana.

If the foregoing might have left some doubt as to the cogency of our hypothesis, we can add another document from the same group, undated but obviously early Ammi-ditana. The obverse has four lines of writing, the reverse is anepigraphic. The text runs as follows:

Inana-ma[nsum]
chief dirge singer [of the goddess Annunitum]
son of Mar[duk-naṣir]
servant of Ammi-[ditana]

This cannot be anything but the four-line inscription which had to be written on Inana-mansum's seal, a model for the seal cutter.[3] Another completely useless document once his seal had been cut, preserved among his personal mementoes in his very special box.

Our reconstruction of a box full of mementoes shows that even day-to-day economic texts could be reinvested with a new meaning, could be recontextualized and rise above the economic level to the emotional one. This is a journey of historical discovery that could not have been undertaken in any other place than a well-excavated archive and these are findings that cannot be duplicated (or disproved) in any other setting than another such archive.

This box must have been very precious for the family, with a value extending beyond the purely economic. No doubt, on certain very special occasions Inana-mansum must have taken his son to the archive room just like his own father, and before him his father's father, to show him the special box, giving the family tradition a concrete framework in the form of this collection of memorabilia. And here the arduous acquisition of reading cuneiform, especially the proper names, was rewarded with the ability to trace back the family line over the generations.

[3] An impression of this seal was published by Charpin (1988: seal G. p. 30 and plate p. 28). The first line is not rolled on HG 96 but can now safely be restored with Inana-mansum's name, as proposed by Charpin.

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Concern for the future

Unfortunately, the office of chief dirge singer, prestigious as it was, also had less positive and even life-threatening aspects to it. A number of documents allow us a glimpse of Ur-Utu's metaphysical concerns.

First there is a group of eleven diviner's reports. These texts are technical résumés of the observation of the internal organs, in particular a description of the parts of the liver, without further comments. The diviner must have communicated his interpretation of these ominous signs orally to Ur-Utu and handed him his technical report as evidence. Unfortunately the dates of only a few of these documents are preserved. Two are dated to the 5th year of Ammi-ṣaduqa (1641), in months 8 and 11; two others are dated to the 10th year (1636), months 4 and 5. We may suppose there were many more of these documents, and that Ur-Utu frequently consulted the diviners. This might indicate a great concern for knowledge about his (and his family's) well-being in the future and even in the immediate future, since he had consultations in months 4 and 5, 8 and 11. We have evidence to suggest that Ur-Utu had good reasons for doing this, other than a general curiosity about things to come. A remarkable fact is that all of these reports were found in room 17 of the house, which means they were sorted out and meant to be kept, even though some of them were thirteen years old by the time of the archive's rearrangement and the fire.

Singing dirges for a reason

In no fewer than forty-six letters out of 200 in the archive reference is made to a 'binding' (*e'iltum*) of the chief dirge singer. This word is often included in the opening lines of the letter, such as this one:

> Speak to my father, thus Muti-ilum: May Šamaš and Marduk release your *e'iltum*. The Queen of Sippar, whose word finds grace with her beloved Šamaš: may she release you from your sins, may she intercede for you with her beloved Marduk. May one who has seen your sorrow (now) see your revival. (Di 614)

The frequency of these references indicates that the chief dirge singer must have been regularly subject to this phenomenon, interpreted by Caroline Janssen (1991: 96) as a binding by liability. That this circumstance was not theoretical or abstract but could lead to disease and fear for one's life as a consequence, is illustrated by another letter from the archive about someone else: '(…) an *e'iltum* which cannot be bound has turned his face pale…and he died' (Di 662).

In order to escape this danger the chief dirge singer had to be released (*paṭār e'iltim*). This release could only be effectuated by the gods, probably by means of a ritual as described in Di 604:

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> I just heard the release of your *e'iltum* before Šamaš and Marduk: in the gate the chief musician (UGULA NAR), at the moment of the raising(?) of the *taqribtum*-prayer, lined up the sanga-priest of Šamaš, the sanga-priest of Aya, the *gudapsû*-priests (…) and the *erib bītim*-priest, (…). I heard the words of the sanga-priest of Šamaš: a shudder caught him (…).

The binding itself was associated with darkness and silence. The letter Di 1672 (Janssen 1991: 100–101) reads: 'The god […]: may he show the light to your darkness, may he release your *e'iltum*.' Ur-Utu wrote to high officials in Babylon, who were are able to predict that he would soon be released (Janssen 1991: 89). They told him not to worry in the meantime. Eventually he was always released. We have no indication of the origin or reason for this 'binding'. In some cases other persons were also 'bound', mostly prisoners. In such contexts the chief dirge singer could and did take over their 'binding', freeing them but putting himself in danger and having to wait to be released by the gods. Whatever the particulars may be, as Caroline Janssen (1991: 98) writes, 'The *e'iltum*-pattern being part of his function, the chief dirge singer is regularly subjected to a cycle of opposites of darkness and light, distress and joy, *e'iltum* and release.'

In this light, the life of a chief dirge singer does not seem to have been a very enviable one. The regular fear that he would not be released by the gods may have prompted him on the one hand to ask people in Babylon to intervene on his behalf and on the other to try and find out what the gods had in store for him by consulting diviners on a regular basis. He must have been a dirge singer with good reason. Indeed, we know that dirges were sung to placate the gods…

Praying to the gods, writing to the goddess

Six *ikribu* prayers were found in Ur-Utu's archive. They formed part of the diviner's ritual, as one of them mentions: 'In the extispicy (*têrtum*) that I perform…by an extispicy of good health…' (De Meyer 1982: 274–275). In fact two of our prayers were found together with four diviners' reports in lot U in the new archive room, which confirms the link between them.

Ur-Utu prayed to the gods requesting the well-being of his family and household. The questions asked in two of the prayers are very suggestive of Ur-Utu's anxiety over the 'binding' (although this is not mentioned explicitly). The first ends with: 'Will Ur-Utu remain alive and well? Establish a good oracle for Ur-Utu, an oracle of health and life!' (Di 261, De Meyer 1982: 274–275). It covers a whole year of 360 days, from and to the 20th day of Nisannum, the first month of the year. This prayer is addressed to the god Ninsiana, the male version of the Venus deity, the Ištar of the stars. This deity was connected with light, as seen too in a dedication found in the archive, a remarkable four-line text in Akkadian and unorthographic Sumerian which states:

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Ninsiana, pure god
whose light fills heaven and earth,
who dispenses good, prosperity and life
for his servant who reveres him. (De Meyer 1989a: 213–222)

The second one is addressed to the goddess Annunitum (Di 262, De Meyer 1982: 277–278). Again, Ur-Utu requests well-being for the whole year, from the month of Nisannum to the next month of Nisannum.

Di 306 is another prayer to Ninsiana, dated on the eleventh day of the sixth month of the 14th year of Ammi-ṣaduqa. The god is asked to grant well-being to Ur-Utu, for a period of eight months. Ur-Utu hopes that he will see the faces of Annunitum and Marduk. In a very broken prayer to Annunitum (Di 515) Ur-Utu prays for his life and well-being, again for a period of less than a year. Two periods seem to be involved: from the tenth to the twelfth month and from the fourth to a month whose name is broken in the text. All of the prayers were found in room 17, indicating they were meant to be kept.

Finally, in an undated letter to his goddess Annunitum, Ur-Utu quite movingly writes:

> To my mistress who loves life, say: thus speaks your servant Ur-Utu. As my mistress knows, a servant who for his master, a servant woman who for her mistress does not carry an unconscious fault *(hītum)* or a conscious one (*gillatum*), does not exist (Di 525, De Meyer 1989b)

and then proceeds to request the rapid lifting of the taboo (*asakkum*) of Adad. These texts show a person who was greatly concerned about his future and that of his household, a concern that was probably based on the frequently dire situation linked to his office. From darkness to light in a never ending cycle.

Conclusion

As the chief dirge singer of the goddess Annunitum's temple in Sippar-Amnanum, Ur-Utu was certainly a prominent citizen. He had power, as head of a large institution. He was wealthy and, to a certain extent, learned. He could read and write to an elementary level, which was more than most of his contemporaries. He knew the value of the written word, both practically for the management of his estate but also more emotionally through the mementoes he kept in his archive, which kept his ancestors' names from oblivion.

On the other hand his life cannot always have been a happy one. His office of chief dirge singer seemingly entailed repeated dangerous 'bindings' from which only the gods could free him, not without some period of anxiety. As if this were not enough, his brothers did not make life easy for him. They disputed his inheritance and that of his mother in lawsuits over many years. But even this was not the end of his toils. In a letter his dear wife, with the lovely name Ra'imtum (literally 'lover'), wrote to him:

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> Now you have gone to the lawsuits and I do not know what you have been doing. As a [*very unfortunately broken*] I came to the house of a poor man. I always respected your father but whereas I take care you will never have anything …(Di 617, Janssen 1993: 49)

Poor, poor rich man![4]

Further reading

The final report on the excavation of Sippar-Amnanum in general and the chief dirge singer's house in particular is Gasche (1989, in French). The history of the house, in archaeology and texts, is to be found in Janssen et al. (1994, in French). An overview of the composition of the archive is Tanret (2004, in French) and the complete story of the tablet box is given in Tanret (2008). The scribal education of Ur-Utu is the subject of the monograph Tanret (2002, in French).

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[4] This article is the result of research undertaken within the framework of the Interuniversity of Attraction Poles Programme VI/34—Belgian Federal Office for Science Policy.

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CHAPTER 14

MUSIC, THE WORK OF PROFESSIONALS

NELE ZIEGLER

Music was undoubtedly highly esteemed in ancient Mesopotamia: numerous artefacts dating to the third to first millennium BC show musicians, male and female, performing in the presence of the rulers of Mesopotamia or simply on their own. Surviving musical instruments, most importantly the lyres and harps found among the grave goods in the so-called Royal Tombs of Ur (Rashid 1984: 30–43), were fashioned from the most expensive materials and exhibit supreme workmanship. Music was the preferred mode of communication with the gods and the favoured vehicle for the transmission of myths and epics: most of the compositions which we today tend to classify as literary texts were in fact meant to be sung. Music was valued by all levels of society and accompanied various aspects of the human existence. Highly specialized expert musicians were counted among the scholars. They were highly regarded members of society with privileged access to the royal courts and temples which tended to provide them with their livelihood.

And yet we have no clear idea of the soundscape of Mesopotamian music whose development through the millennia can be traced only crudely. Moreover, not a single composer can be matched with his compositions, a situation characteristic for Mesopotamian authorship in general (see Foster in this volume), and few judgements on the achievements of musicians survive: virtually the only ones praised for their musical aptitude were not professional musicians but rulers, Šulgi of Ur (r. 2094–2047 BC) being the most celebrated.

Music and mood are closely connected, and Mesopotamian music was no exception. Lamentations, which survive in large numbers, were meant to create a sombre yet relaxed mood to calm the gods: the musical performance was to prevent divine anger which could result in human suffering (see Löhnert in this volume). Cuneiform texts indicate another equally important purpose of music: to give pleasure. Musicians promised their patrons delightful performances, as in this Old Babylonian letter to the king of Mari: 'Once he has entered safely my lord will hear all I have prepared and he will rejoice!'

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(Ziegler 2007: no. 23, ll. 10–14), and they are described as those 'who gladden the heart of the gods' (*muhaddû libbi ilī*: Nabonidus, see Schaudig 2001: 373, ii 25) or 'who perform music of joy' (*ēpiš ningūti*: Assurbanipal, see Borger 1996: 106, 227, Prism B VI 55), also in the context of war, as in a report of Sargon II of Assyria (r. 721–705 BC): 'I entered my military camp with joy and rejoicing, accompanied by musicians (playing) lyres and cymbals' (Thureau-Dangin 1912, l. 159).

Royal courts and temples maintained a well-organized musical establishment, financing a great number of musicians and facilitating their training and creative work. There is ample evidence for the interest of Mesopotamian rulers in music: at court, especially fine and precious instruments were put to use, the women's quarters of the palaces housed numerous female musicians who received ongoing dedicated training, and the presence of foreign musicians attests to a pronounced interest in exotic music. Hence, a list of Neo-Assyrian palace personnel from the 7th century BC enumerates 'eight female head musicians, three Aramaean women, eleven Hittite women, thirteen women from Tyre, (…) nine Kassite women: in all 61 female musicians' (Fales and Postgate 1992: no. 24, ll. 20–23, 26–27).

Music at the royal court: A case study from Old Babylonian Mari

How exactly was professional music organized? For the palace, this question can be answered with the help of the Old Babylonian archives found at Mari (modern Tell Hariri), the homonymous capital of a kingdom situated along the Middle Euphrates and the Khabur river, and this case certainly provides a valid template for other Mesopotamian centres. Excavation of the palace archives yielded several thousands of clay tablets and fragments, which document in rich detail the kingdom's final twenty years before the capture and destruction of its capital by the troops of Hammurabi of Babylon.

Letters and administrative texts illuminate the musical establishment under the last two rulers, Yasmah-Addu, who ruled Mari before 1775 BC under the overlordship of his father, the successful conqueror Samsi-Addu, who controlled all of northern Mesopotamia at the time, and his successor Zimri-Lim (r. 1775–1762 BC), a member of the previous royal house who conquered the throne of Mari for himself. While references to temple musicians are rather sparse, seventy letters written by or about musicians, as well as numerous economic and administrative texts allow us a detailed reconstruction of the organization of music at the royal court. Thanks to these archives we know that the palace's female inhabitants included a significant number of musicians, the exact figure varying over time. At the beginning of Zimri-Lim's reign the palace housed 350 women and girls, nearly half of whom were occupied with music—among them royal relatives, concubines, music teachers, and their young students.

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Zimri-Lim apparently entertained the habit of adding thirty new female musicians to his court whenever he achieved a military victory; this tradition, combined with the birth of children at court, caused the number of female palace inhabitants to rise over the course of his reign to more than 600 women, more than a third of whom were musicians (Ziegler 1999).

The Mari archives also show that the kingdom's elite shared their king's taste for female musicians, although, as is to be expected, they employed them in far smaller numbers. Moreover, about 130 men are also attested in musical professions, but as the male musicians, unlike the women, did not receive regular wool or oil rations and hence were not necessarily all included in the palace's administrative records the data about them is far less comprehensive and meaningful.

The chief musician

The king charged a high-ranking palace official with supervision of the palace's musical establishment: the 'chief musician', whose Akkadian title, *nargallum*, is a loan word from Sumerian nar-gal, literally 'great musician'. The sources indicate clearly that there was only one holder of this office in any Mesopotamian capital and therefore state. This élite official was responsible for the training of male and female musicians, for their appointment to various posts, and for the rehearsal of particular musical works and their performance; he also oversaw the production and maintenance of musical instruments (Figure 14.1). In fulfilling these responsibilities, the chief musician had a group of assistants, most importantly the chief music instructor (*mušāhizum*) and other teachers. The chief musician was personally appointed by the king and enjoyed his trust and friendship, resulting in occasional dispatches to foreign courts in order to act on the king's behalf, including in such sensitive matters as arranging dynastic marriages (see Charpin in this volume). At the home court, the chief musician liaised with the queen and the female musicians of the women's quarters.

Rišiya, the controversial chief musician at the royal court of Mari

We know in great detail about the chief musicians under the two last kings of Mari, thanks to the letters exchanged between them and their patrons and thanks to their frequent mention in the palace's administrative records. Rišiya held the office of chief musician during the reign of Yasmah-Addu and continued into the first eighteen months of Zimri-Lim's rule; he was then replaced by Warad-ilišu. In the following we will trace the career paths of these two chief musicians to illustrate the possible professional development of royal musicians in other, less densely documented periods of Mesopotamian history.

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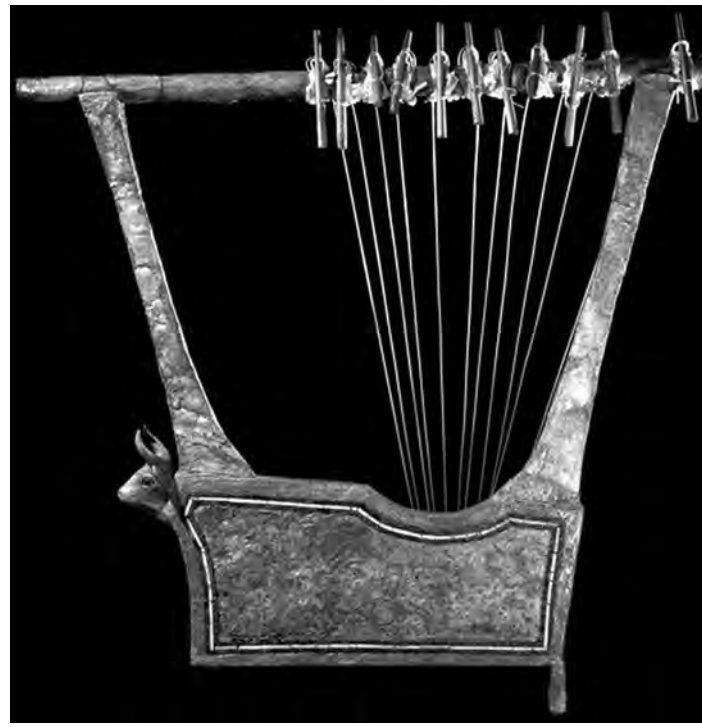

FIGURE 14.1 Silver lyre from the Early Dynastic Royal Cemetery of Ur (British Museum, ME 121199). Valuable instruments decorated with gold- or silver-plating and inlays of precious materials were frequently used in palaces and temples, but it is rare for them to survive archeologically. This instrument was tall, more than a metre high; lyres from this time were often decorated with bulls' heads. (Photo © Trustees of the British Museum, from the British Museum's website: http://tinyurl.com/44bk6ba)

Rišiya was chosen as Mari's chief musician by his king, Yasmah-Addu, around the year 1782 BC; his background is unknown but characteristics in his writing style have led to the suggestion that he was from the city of Rapiqum on the Euphrates. Yasmah-Addu's father, Samsi-Addu, was strictly against this man's appointment, writing the following to his son:

> You have appointed the musician Rišiya to the position of chief musician at Mari, who cannot even hold on to a single (student), and thus you have destroyed music at Mari. What is this about? Instead promote Gumul-Dagan to the post of chief musician on behalf of his 'brothers' from Mari, and place by his side Ilšu-ibbišu, who [cannot be] chief musician! (Ziegler 2007: no. 13)

Samsi-Addu's fierce reaction against Rišiya's appointment is remarkable and may hint at intense rivalry between different factions, as Samsi-Addu's own chief musician Ibbi-Ilabrat was the mentor of Gumul-Dagan and Ilšu-ibbišu, the two men mentioned in the

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letter as more suitable for the position. While Yasmah-Addu did not entirely yield to his father's complaints, he did arrange a compromise: his own candidate, Rišiya, remained the chief musician at Mari while Ilšu-ibbišu, his father's candidate, was to support him in the role of chief musical instructor (*mušāhizum*), the second highest position. It is not entirely surprising that the ensuing collaboration proved strenuous.

Gumul-Dagan, Samsi-Addu's favourite candidate, missed out altogether and was not appointed to any prestigious post in Mari. He even had to suffer public humiliation at a royal banquet, of which he complained to Samsi-Addu. We gather that Gumul-Dagan, when visiting the court of Mari as Samsi-Addu's emissary, was slighted by Yasmah-Addu. The king of Mari supposedly violated etiquette deliberately when he passed the ceremonial wine cup not to Gumul-Dagan, who could expect to receive this honour first, but instead to his former rival Rišiya and all other musicians of the court of Mari. In a letter, Rišiya angrily defends his and his musicians' position against Gumul-Dagan (Ziegler 2007: no. 14).

As chief musician, Rišiya maintained a residence in the city of Mari; if we may apply the situation attested for his successor, this residence served as the conservatoire (*mummum*) where the court musicians were trained and their instruments created and repaired (Ziegler 2007: 77–78). The office of chief musician at Mari also came with a considerable landholding near the city. Rišiya experienced a series of problems with his estate which we cannot reconstruct in detail, but at the core of the problem was the fact that sustained neglect, linked to the detention of Rišiya's steward at Mari, led to the eventual loss of the property to another high-ranking official. Rišiya reacted by petitioning his king, Yasmah-Addu, for a replacement estate and was indeed promised a property of 100 *ikû* (*c.* 36 hectares) of prime farmland. The administrators delayed handing over this land to Rišiya, apparently concerned that he might ruin another well-run estate. It took Rišiya several additional petitions to the king before he eventually succeeded in securing a property, albeit considerably smaller than the one originally promised by the king. His new estate was 60 *ikû* (*c.* 21.6 hectares) of land in Bab-Nahlim, situated far less conveniently on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, south of Mari. But Rišiya was pleased and sent the following thank-you note to Yasmah-Addu:

> May the gods Anum and Enlil, the Eštar goddesses, Dagan and Šamaš, who love you, protect you and keep you alive forever! I heard the (contents of the) tablet which my lord sent me because of the field and I was very happy! I was aglow (with happiness)! (Ziegler 2007: no. 26, ll. 3–9)

Rišiya's blessings are a curiosity amongst the contemporary royal correspondence, which does not usually feature blessings (Ziegler 2007: 95–96). This particular letter is especially exuberant as he invokes the protection of almost the entire divine world for his king. It is difficult to estimate exactly how generous Yasmah-Addu's gift was as there are no comparable figures. A property of 60 *ikû* seems to have been at the lower end of the size of estates held by Mari's provincial governors, but of course Rišiya had already squandered another property; in any case, he seems to have been content with what he eventually received.

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As Mari's chief musician, Rišiya was responsible for all musicians of the kingdom, as detailed in the following memorandum documenting a restructuring of the organization of the performing artists:

> Sixty female [musicians will be given] to Rišiya. Ten men from the City (Assur) [will be given] to Rišiya. [Ten] singers [will be given] to Rišiya. Of the musicians, teachers and their students [...] for the royal apartments [will be given] to Rišiya. Rišiya will maintain the *aštalûm* musicians of the orchestra [...] in their former position. Rišiya will maintain the jesters [in their] former position. Ten men [will be] given to (the chief lamenter) Amur-gimil-Šamaš for performing lamentations, and they will work with Rišiya. (Ziegler 2007: no. 15)

According to this, Rišiya commanded all musical performers, female and male, including not only the many court musicians of different levels but also the lamenters (*kalûm*) and the jesters (*aluzinnum*); it is very likely that the acrobatic dancers (*huppûm*), known from elsewhere to be among the chief musician's charges, were mentioned in one of the broken passages of this tablet.

The chief musical instructor Ilšu-ibbišu and his rivalry with Rišiya

While Rišiya had the services of the chief musical instructor Ilšu-ibbišu and other teachers, he was not free from interference: king Yasmah-Addu, who apparently had received a musical education, liked to get involved and often undermined his chief musician's authority. The king decided to take certain trainee musicians with him to the courts of his father, Samsi-Addu, and his brother Išme-Dagan, king of Assur, for them to receive musical training there (Ziegler 2007: nos. 24–25). He also demanded that certain music pupils in Rišiya's charge be transferred to Ilšu-ibbišu, who increasingly threatened the chief musician's position and influence at court, as Rišiya pointed out in a long letter to Yasmah-Addu:

> My lord wrote to me as follows: 'Keep sixty girls in your charge and hand over the rest to Ilšu-ibbišu!' Previously, there were 42 girls of whom my lord took away from me 16 girls and two blind girls and gave them to Ilšu-ibbišu and instead of whom my lord gave me 18 girls of (the harem of the previous king) Yahdun-Lim. In total I have (only) 42 girls in my charge—that's it! Of these 42 girls there are 24 girls belonging to the big orchestra (*mazzāzum*), 18 songstresses is the rest. (But) if my lord commands me I will give them all to him (i.e., Ilšu-ibbišu). (Ziegler 2007: no. 17, ll. 6′–20′)

Rišiya did indeed end up with far fewer female musicians at his disposal than Ilšu-ibbišu: an undated administrative list shows that the chief musical instructor commanded the services of twice as many musicians, of four different categories and abilities, as the chief musician himself, who was in charge of only one kind of specialization.

> 23 female orchestra members (*šitrētum*), 21 *kanšātum*, 44 female percussionists (*kezrētum*), six Amorite women, in total 94 women belonging to Ilšu-ibbišu; 49 *kanšātum* belonging to Rišiya. (Ziegler 1999: no. 37)

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When Yasmah-Addu ordered the transfer of female musicians from Rišiya's to Ilšu-ibbišu's authority, the chief musician was especially unhappy at the loss of two blind girls, whom he especially singled out. Blind musicians enjoyed a special regard, as safe from visual distraction they were thought to possess a more focused, more distinctive musical talent, a belief which Mesopotamia shares with many other cultures including Egypt and Greece. The myth *Enki and Ninmah* has the god Ea decree a good fate for the blind man by making him into a musician (ETCSL 1.1.2, ll. 62–64). We need to bear in mind this special appreciation for blind musicians when we read how Rišiya, in the next passage of the same letter to Yasmah-Addu, comments on malicious rumours circulating about his supposed failure to bring the blind musicians' potential to fruition:

> My lord wrote to me to have the blind men be led away, using those words: 'The lion does not plough, he obstructs the ploughmen.' Now then, have I not achieved good results in your house? He who slanders me in front of my lord has now been turned into the ploughman and I [am to be] the lion who obstructs the ploughman? It is I who have achieved good results in your house! It is he who has spoiled these good results ever since he arrived! Does my lord not know whether I have achieved good results in the house or not? As soon as my lord arrives safely in Mari he should ask (to inspect) my work and the work of the one who has slandered me in front of my lord and on that day he may see the good results! Why am I not heard in the confidential council? The servants and singers should be present in front of my lord and may my lord receive from us as much as I have created and he has created! (Ziegler 2007: no. 17, ll. 21´–45´)

Evidently, the slanderer whose name Rišiya carefully avoids to mention was no other than his nominal subordinate, the chief musical instructor Ilšu-ibbišu, in all likelihood a much younger man. The exact nature of his accusations against Rišiya remains unclear but it is obvious that the quality of the precious blind musicians' training had been called into question. While the letter is an impressive testament to Rišiya's continued difficulties with Ilšu-ibbišu, the chief musician could rely on the fact that the king would ultimately side with him, for he enjoyed Yasmah-Addu's special affection. This friendship emerges quite clearly in a letter from Yasmah-Addu to his father, Samsi-Addu, sent when the king feared for the life of his ageing chief musician:

> I have already previously mentioned this to Daddy (*addā*): the physician Meranum should come here! But he is still not here, and Rišiya is dying, he is very ill. If Daddy agrees Meranum should arrive here as fast as can be and save Rišiya's life. He must not die! (Dossin 1950: no. 115 = Durand 1997: no. 168)

Two royal patrons: the music lover and the philistine

King Yasmah-Addu not only held his chief musician Rišiya in deep affection, he loved music itself. There is good evidence that he had been educated by his father Samsi-Addu's chief musician, Ibbi-Ilabrat (Ziegler 2007: 148–149). Under his rule, Mari grew into a

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leading cultural centre of Samsi-Addu's Upper Mesopotamian empire, and became so attractive to musicians that several are known to have left their previous posts in order to seek the king of Mari's patronage. Samsi-Addu did not appreciate this and in several letters ordered his son to release the renegade musicians (Ziegler 2007: nos. 57, 73), claiming that musicians and other courtiers sought out Mari as a well-known centre of debauchery in order to drink and gamble (Dossin 1950: no. 28 = Durand 1997: no. 2; Ziegler 2007: 2). But Yasmah-Addu did not mind if musicians joined his court in less than straightforward circumstances, and neither was he worried about their supposed wantonness. Despite his father's complaints he usually managed to hold on to their services permanently, ensuring that the musical establishment grew steadily in size and reputation.

Samsi-Addu's death in 1776 BC led to the collapse of his Upper Mesopotamian empire. Zimri-Lim, a member of Mari's previous royal house, managed to conquer the crown of Mari; this signalled the end of Mari's musical heyday. Zimri-Lim had lived as a fugitive in exile and did not bring an existing royal household to Mari. While he kept on the aged Rišiya as chief musician he was not willing to extend his patronage to the many musicians who had been employed by Yasmah-Addu. In a desperate letter, Rišiya petitioned the king to reconsider:

> May Dagan, Itur-Mer and the protective deities of Mari save you! Why does my lord forget about me? And (why) won't he employ my orchestra? (…) They should review music in Mari and put the conservatoire to work! Is there any conservatoire which does not have a patron? May Anum and Enlil love you! (Ziegler 2007: no. 18)

It is not known whether this letter made Zimri-Lim change his mind, but it took several years before music regained some of its previous importance at the royal court. The chief musician Rišiya found himself primarily occupied with other responsibilities and was dispatched by Zimri-Lim to various foreign courts as chief matchmaker and escort of royal brides. Rišiya's first task was to arrange the marriage between a sister of Zimri-Lim and a Yaminite prince, a milestone in the peace-making efforts between Zimri-Lim's Sim'alite dynasty and the Yaminite tribe. In the next year he accompanied the diviner Asqudum to the royal court of Aleppo in order to find a bride for Zimri-Lim himself (see Charpin in this volume). But after the princess reached Mari safely Rišiya disappears from the sources: nothing is known of his final destiny but he may simply have died of old age.

Warad-ilišu, the new chief musician of Mari

One of Rišiya's musicians, Warad-ilišu, succeeded him to the office of chief musician at Mari. Warad-ilišu does not seem to have been a son or other relative of Rišiya's and indeed it appears that the position of chief musician was never inherited but that the king appointed a distinguished musician of his choice to the office.

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During Yasmah-Addu's reign, Warad-ilišu was but one of many musicians at court. In the early years of Zimri-Lim's rule he may have held the position of chief musical instructor (*mušāhizum*) under Rišiya, which would make him the replacement for Ilšu-ibbišu, Rišiya's former nemesis, who is no longer attested after Zimri-Lim's takeover. While Zimri-Lim was dispatching Rišiya to Aleppo in order to find him a bride we see Warad-ilišu responsible for training female musicians who had recently joined the royal court as war captives (Ziegler 2007: no. 38). Once Warad-ilišu was appointed as chief musician Zimri-Lim did not seem to have much appreciation for him, as emerges from a letter sent by the king to the queen mother Addu-duri:

> I have not given Warad-ilišu permission to wait in the city of Terqa: [he should] come here! Do not be negligent in this matter! Give strict orders to the chief musician in regard to the education of the female musicians! (Dossin 1978: no. 148 = Durand 2000: no. 1111)

But in the course of time Warad-ilišu won the king's trust. In the sensitive political climate after the king of Ešnunna and the rulers of the Yaminite tribes had allied against the kingdom of Mari, Zimri-Lim delegated security matters in the capital to his chief musician (Ziegler 2007: no. 47),

By now Warad-ilišu is attested in Mari's administrative palace records as the recipient of valuable gifts such as textiles, vessels, and weapons; he figured prominently during public festivals and received special gifts. In lists enumerating the highest officials of the kingdom in a hierarchical sequence the chief musician is now mentioned ahead of the provincial governors, directly after the kingdom's top executives such as the vizier, Sammetar, and Mari's city overseer, Bahdi-Lim. Warad-ilišu's position habitually brought him into close contact with foreign visitors, and Zimri-Lim sent him on important diplomatic missions abroad, twice to the kingdom of Aleppo (Durand 2002; Ziegler 2007: 171–175). His first assignment there was to arrange a suitable display place for a statue of Zimri-Lim into the temple of the storm-god of Aleppo; on his second mission he helped to establish an estate for Zimri-Lim in the city of Alalakh on the Mediterranean coast.

Warad-ilišu's country estate in Šakka near Mari is mentioned in the administrative texts in much the same context as other landed properties held by Zimri-Lim's officials. In addition, it was the destination for a variety of materials which may have been used for the manufacture of musical instruments; if this is correct then Warad-ilišu's country estate may have been a place where musicians were trained. There is no doubt that this was one function of his city residence in Mari which, as the conservatoire (*mummum*), was the administrative centre for all musical matters.

Like his predecessor Rišiya, Warad-ilišu took care of the training of the female musicians from the palace's women's quarters. When a number of women of northern Mesopotamian origin came to Mari as war captives and were destined to work as slaves in Mari's textile workshops, Zimri-Lim instructed his queen Šibtu to select thirty women for the royal harem in the presence of the chief musician; in his letter the king made it perfectly clear that while he would value the women's musical abilities he also had great interest in their physical appearance:

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> Now I will have the female textile workers brought to you. There are some priestesses among them. Check the priestesses and hand them over to the house of the female textile workers. From among these and the other textile workers select thirty, or however many suitable ones can be selected, who do not have a blemish from head to toe (literally, from toe nail to hair of head) and hand them over to Warad-ilišu. Warad-ilišu is to instruct them in (the art of) the northern orchestra. In addition, their living conditions are to be altered. Take care of their food so that their features will not change (i.e. so that they will not lose weight). Warad-ilišu should be present when you select the textile workers. Order (the palace overseer) Mukannišum (to take care) that the features of the remaining textile workers whom you will hand over to him will not change. (Dossin 1978: no. 126 = Durand 2000: no. 1166)

Besides his musicians' looks, Zimri-Lim attached great importance to the use of prestigious musical instruments, and in his correspondence there are multiple mentions of golden instruments (e.g. the letters Ziegler 2007: no. 43; Dossin 1978: no. 137 = Durand 2000: no. 1160 = Ziegler 2007: no. 12). For him, public musical performance was clearly a chance to display material wealth, comparable to the use of luxury tableware at royal banquets (Guichard 2005).

Warad-ilišu was Mari's last chief musician. The troops of Hammurabi of Babylon conquered the city in 1761 BC and two years later the palace and the fortification walls of Mari were razed; our hitherto abundant sources for life at an Old Babylonian royal court run dry.

The situation elsewhere

The chief musician (Akkadian *nargallum*, Sumerian nar-gal), as a high-ranking courtier who enjoyed his king's close confidence, is not only a feature of the Old Babylonian period but also typical for Mesopotamian courts of other periods; even the mythical king Gilgameš is said to have had the chief musician Lugal-gabagar in his service charged with immortalizing his master's adventures (Gadotti 2006). In Mari of the Early Dynastic period, the 'august musician' (nar mah) Ur-Nanše probably held the rank of chief musician as he could afford to dedicate two statues of himself to the local temples (Parrot 1967: 89–96, pls. XLV–XLVII; Figure 14.2). His hairstyle and dress resemble those of the singer shown on the so-called 'Standard of Ur'—a piece of luxury furniture of unknown purpose with precious inlay decoration—performing at a banquet together with a lyre player (Woolley 1934: 57–62, 266–274, pls. 90–93; see Figure 8.2). He too may represent a chief musician. The evidence available for the Third Dynasty of Ur attests to the presence of one chief musician in each provincial capital city (Pruzsinszky 2007), just as in the succeeding Old Babylonian period. The title of chief musician is also attested for the royal court of the Middle Assyrian kingdom (Jakob 2003: 520–522). In 7th-century Assyria, the head singer (*rab zammārē*) was

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FIGURE 14.2 Statue of the 'august musician' Ur-Nanše, *c.* 24th century BC, excavated at Mari and now on display in the National Museum Damascus. Ur-Nanše was the chief musician of king Iblul-Il of Mari (*c.* 24th century BC). The exquisitely fashioned statue shows female characteristics and, when first discovered, was believed to depict a woman (though this is excluded by the inscription); today, it is thought to portray a castrate. (Photo © Mission Archéologique de Mari, reproduced from Margueron 2004: 281, Figure 267)

clearly an official of elevated status: Bulluṭu, the head singer of Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c.* 630 BC), was appointed to the prestigious position of yearly eponym (Mattila 2009: 159–160).

In my opinion, the chief musicians of the third and early second millennium BC were eunuchs. Gudam addresses his lord Gilgameš in the Sumerian dialect of Emesal, the 'refined speech' used by women, while the statue of Mari musician Ur-Nanše exhibits the physical characteristics of a castrate (Figure 14.2). If the chief musicians of the Old Babylonian period were eunuchs, a matter which cannot be decided for certain given the available documentation, this would explain why they were deemed trustworthy as the king's matchmakers, why they could have close contact with the members of the women's quarters of the palace, and also why there are no discernible family ties, leading to dynasties of chief musicians comparable to those so well attested for Mesopotamian

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scholars (Ziegler 2007: 9–10). The situation remains unclear for the later periods, for which there are at present no dedicated studies.

It is not surprising that chief musicians who enjoyed the king's patronage and confidence, and whose opinions and decisions influenced the careers of all other musicians, met with the envy of many. The jesters (*aluzinnum*) at court, who worked, as we have seen, under the chief musician, made fun of their superior—for example, in this joke from a literary compilation of the jester's art:

> If it is cold during the *nabrû* festival (in January) they will put the overseer of the musicians (*a-kil* LÚ.NAR.MEŠ) on a skewer—why is it (always) cold during the *nabrû* festival? (Wiseman and Black 1996: no. 205: iii 3′–5′)

With banter like this, the jesters expressed resentment against the chief musician which may also have been shared by many members of the musical establishment.

Musicians in temple and cult

In addition to musical activities conducted at court, the chief musician (*nargallum*) was also responsible for the music performed as part of the temple cult; the available sources, however, elaborate on this aspect only very occasionally.

The lamenters

We have already mentioned that at Old Babylonian Mari the lamenters (*kalûm*), while headed by a lamenter-in-chief (*galamāhum*), worked under the chief musician's authority. In southern Mesopotamia, however, the situation was different: there, each city had a lamenter-in-chief who held supreme musical responsibility for the main temple as well as the other sanctuaries of the city. He could also hold the office of chief temple administrator (*šangûm*), as the lamenter-in-chief's responsibility did not end with musical performance during cultic activities but encompassed the entire organization of temple worship (Shehata in press). When southern Mesopotamia became unfit for permanent human habitation owing to changes in the irrigation system in the 16th century BC so that the large cities had to be abandoned, the cults of theses cities were not simply given up. Instead they moved to northern Mesopotamia, resulting in two or more lamenters-in-chief working in the same city—for example, in Kiš—a novel and delicate situation which could lead to conflicts of authority (Shehata 2009b: 55–93; in press).

The lamenters-in-chief, and other lamenters, played percussion and stringed instruments in the temple cult. They kept them in safe custody: these objects were not only made of the most precious materials and gained in value and importance because of their often considerable antiquity but could be seen as deities in their own right (Selz 1997). It is quite possible that the lamenters sang in a high falsetto, and there are popular sayings

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that poke fun at their vanity and their peculiarities. This has led to the hypothesis that the lamenters of the third and early second millennium BC belonged to a 'third gender', whether they were castrated men just like the chief musicians we have already encountered or hermaphrodites (e.g. Gabbay 2007; Shehata 2009a).

The best-known lamenter-in-chief of Mesopotamian history is one Ur-Utu, whose private archive was excavated in the Old Babylonian city of Sippar-Amnanum (modern Tell ed-Der); thanks to this evidence the daily life of a lamenter-in-chief is known to us in some detail (Tanret 2008; and in this volume, with a different interpretation of Ur-Utu's parentage). Ur-Utu had been educated in the family home of his adoptive father, the lamenter-in-chief Inana-mansum, together with his adoptive brothers, none of whom was Inana-mansum's physical child. As a castrate, Inana-mansum was incapable of siring children of his own and, while he was married, his wife was a woman consecrated to a temple (*qadištum*) and not permitted to bear children (Barberon 2005; cf. Ziegler 2007: 20 n. 92). Eventually Inana-mansum appointed Ur-Utu as his sole heir and successor as lamenter-in-chief of Sippar-Amnanum by legal deed, making him his only 'true son' and simultaneously disowning all his other adoptive sons (Janssen 1992). It was only at this time that the heir was given the Sumerian name Ur-Utu, signifying his new status. Ur-Utu's archives tell us very little about the lamenter-in-chief's cultic activities but instead illustrate the manifold and diverse business interests of a wealthy urban household.

If we want insight into the professional responsibilities of the lamenter-in-chief and the other lamenters we must turn to other sources, most importantly ritual instructions (Maul 2001). Playing the divine instruments and singing in the refined Sumerian dialect of Emesal (Black 1991), their main task was to calm and please the gods, as a matter of course but also and especially when human interference in the temple sphere (for example, building work) threatened their peace (Ambos 2004). In addition, they fulfilled an important role in the community's funerary care and cult (Cooper 2006; Michalowski 2006).

But despite their prominent role the lamenters were not the only ones to give musical performances in cultic activities. Literary texts such as the composition known as *The Cursing of Agade* (ll. 196–204) create the distinct impression that, in addition to various professional musicians, most of the population actively participated in public hymns in honour of the gods, with people of all ages and genders singing together (Löhnert in this volume).

Liturgies of cult proceedings provide the context for the songs which the lamenters performed (Tinney 1996: 47–53, and in this volume) but far more work is needed on this little-researched subject. One text from Old Babylonian Mari describes the sequence of a festival in honour of an Eštar goddess (Durand and Guichard 1997: no. 2; cf. Ziegler 2007: 55–63). A divine lyre called Ninigizibara was positioned in front of the deity, with other cult statues and divine symbols. The lamenters took their place to the right-hand side of Ninigizibara while an orchestra of male musicians stood to her left, with the female musicians standing behind them. They performed a variety of songs synchronized with ritual activities, and the surviving passages list no fewer than six different compositions by name:

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> The lamenters sing (the song) *ú-ru-am-ma-da-ru-bi* of the turn of the month […]. As soon as they come to (the song) *mà-e ú-re-mén* […]; they sing (the song) *mà-e ú-re-mén* […]. The lamenters go outside and sing (the song) *i-gi-it-te-en-di-ba-na* […]. They sing the *AN-nu-wa-še*-song of the reception. At the start of the performance of the *AN-nu-wa-še*-song the king rises and remains standing. One of the lamenters sings the *eršemma* lamentation for (the god) Enlil, accompanied by the *halhallatum* drum […]. When the *AN-nu-wa-še*-song is finished the king sits down. When reaching (the song) *gi-ni gi-ni* […]. When reaching (the song) *mu-gi-im mu-gi-im*, before the final song (*kīlum*) […]. (Durand and Guichard 1997: no. 2)

It is difficult to estimate how many musicians were maintained by the various Mesopotamian temples; the numbers certainly differed considerably. An administrative text of the Ur III period (*c.* 21st century BC) indicates that the various shrines of the district of Lagaš employed a total of 180 male musicians and sixty-two lamenters, in addition to smaller numbers of jesters, snake charmers, and bear trainers (Gelb 1975).

Administrative affiliation is of course not a necessary prerequisite for performing in the temple cult. It is a given that musicians in the employ of a sanctuary would actively participate in its cultic activities but at times their services were certainly supplemented by additional musicians. Old Babylonian administrative records from the city of Larsa list the expenses for the seven days of religious celebrations during the month of Šabaṭum (Westenholz and Westenholz 2006; cf. Charpin 2007: 161–166). The accounts show which groups of musicians came into operation on which day and in which deity's honour (Ea, Šamaš, Eštar, Nanaya, Belet-ekallim, Dingirmah, and Panigarra) but the exact number of personnel involved can only be estimated on the basis of the food rations provided for them. It would seem that only relatively modest numbers of musicians and lamenters performed in honour of each deity. The chief musician is mentioned only for the celebrations in honour of the sun god Šamaš and the lamenter-in-chief only for those of the goddess Nanaya.

Other musical performers: female percussionists and acrobatic dancers

The gods Ea and Šamaš received demonstrations from a great number of acrobatic dancers (*huppûm*), as is clear from the vast amount of grain spent on them, while a similarly large cohort of female musicians playing the *tigi* drum performed for the goddesses Eštar and Nanaya. Because of the prominence of Iddin-Nanaya, known as the overseer of a certain group of female musicians called *kezertum*, these can perhaps be identified as women percussionists. Enormous ensembles of women played such drums at religious festivals, as an inscription of the Old Babylonian king Takil-ilissu of Malgium makes clear:

> I installed in that temple 200 female percussionists, a great orchestra, an appropriate clangour, suitable for her great divinity! (Frayne 1990: no. 4.11.2.2, ll. 52–57; Ziegler 2007: 13 n. 37)

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While it is conceivable that at Larsa the female *kezertum* musicians may have been in temple employ (see also for other places Shehata 2009b: 101–103), at Mari they were definitely part of the palace staff.

It is far less certain which institution employed the acrobatic dancers (*huppûm*), who are attested in high numbers performing for Šamaš at Larsa. In Mari they frequently received gifts on the occasion of cultic festivals—for example, those in honour of Eštar—which may indicate a performance during that event. The acrobatic dancers were under the chief musician's authority. He, however, tended to have little regard for them, perhaps because their training did not entail a learned education in Sumerian literature. The dances of these artists were athletic combat performances, which resembled staged sword fights and may have had a competitive element. The chief musician Rišiya held them in such contempt that he could envisage this profession for himself only as the outcome of a curse resulting from taking a false oath: '(If I am not speaking the truth) they shall chase me away in order to (turn) me into an acrobatic dancer!' (Ziegler 2007: no. 16, ll. 19–20).

The people of Mari and their king, however, loved the performances of the acrobatic dancers, who received far more gifts than any other members of the musical establishment. One acrobatic dancer called Piradi describes his trouble with the chief musician Warad-ilišu and a group of musicians led by his rival, the cultic dancer Yar'ip-Addu, in a letter to king Zimri-Lim, which also highlights that the dancers worked (at least) in pairs and could not perform alone (Figure 14.3):

> Now, Yar'ip-Addu, and three musicians with him, went to my slanderer, the chief musician (Warad-ilišu). And now it is said: 'An acrobatic dancer from Yamhad (= kingdom of Aleppo) will come!' This is what I have heard. But I do

FIGURE 14.3 Old Babylonian clay plaque, probably from Ešnunna, showing a pair of acrobatic dancers (*huppûm*) (Louvre, AO 12443; Barrelet 1968: no. 829). (Photo by Karen Radner)

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> hard work and no-one assists me. My lord gave Yarim-Dagan to me in order to assist me but what did Yar'ip-Addu say to Yarim-Dagan? 'Get lost! Don't assist him!' Another time he took Puzzu away from me, whom my lord had given to me, and Yar'ip-Addu put him into wooden shackles! Now the chief musician is coming and slanders me in front of my lord; but my lord should not listen to him before he has checked for himself. Thus he (i.e. the chief musician) will speak: 'Piradi (i.e. the author of the letter) slanders the conservatoire (*bīt mummim*)!' But my lord truly knows when I speak slander and when I do not. (Ziegler 2007: no. 67, ll. 13–33)

Pictorial evidence, such as the scenes on simple cylinder seals, indicates that dancing, dancers, and dances were very popular (Figure 14.4) but little further information is to be found in the textual records (Kilmer 1995: 2608–2611, 2613). In addition to the *huppûm's* acrobatics, various solo and round dances are attested, and public dances, often of a wild nature, formed part of the religious practice. An Old Babylonian literary composition, known as *The Song of Agušaya*, relates how the god of wisdom, Ea, tamed an unruly Eštar goddess who is identified with the snake-shaped deity Irnina (hence the Babylonian name of the text, 'The snake is turned'). This story then acts as an explanation for the existence of a wild dance (*guštum*), which is performed at the Eštar goddesses' yearly festival: 'So that the people of future days might know about us, let it be yearly, let a whirling dance be established among the festival days of the year' (Groneberg 1997: 75–108: Agušaya B, vii 15–16).

Songs and singing as a way of remembering the dead

Mesopotamian temples usually had sufficient resources to provide for their personnel, including musicians, but there is good evidence for rulers dedicating musicians to a god, thereby financing their maintenance at the temple. Two Mari letters report that the elderly king of Carchemish had consecrated his musicians to the god of the netherworld, perhaps because the prospect of death led him to pay special attention to this deity's cult (Ziegler 2007: 65–70). We have already mentioned that lamenters played an important role in funerary cult.

Songs of praise, performed both publicly and in temple cult, were a means of extolling a ruler's achievements and qualities and formed a key strategy in preserving the memory of the celebrated dead, especially rulers; future generations of sovereigns were expected to ensure the everlasting performance of these songs (Radner 2005: 101–111). This is implied by the final words of a hymn praising the Old Babylonian king Išme-Dagan of Isin: 'I, Išme-Dagan, have placed (this song) for ever in the mouth of everyone!' (ETCSL 2.5.4.11, l. 45 = Ludwig 1990: 40). In this, he followed a tradition which had already been pursued by the rulers of the Third Dynasty of Ur, most prominently Šulgi:

> In the cult-places, let no one neglect the songs about me (…) so that they shall never pass out of memory and never lapse from people's mouths. Let them never cease to be sung in the shining Ekur temple! Let them be played for (the god) Enlil

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FIGURE 14.4 Modern impression of an Old Babylonian cylinder seal (BM 134773), showing a dance performance reminiscent of the wild dance (*gušṭum*), which was performed annually in the streets of the city of Larsa, as described in the literary composition known as *The Song of Agušaya*. (Photo from Buchanan 1971: pl. Ie, reproduced with the kind permission of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, formerly the British School of Archaeology in Iraq)

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> in his Shrine of the New Moon! When at the *ešeš* festival they serve the clear beer endlessly like water, may they be offered repeatedly before Enlil as he sits with Ninlil. (Šulgi E, ll. 53–62 = ETCSL 2.4.2.05)

Music and society

Ancient Near Eastern music tended to be taught orally and in a familial setting but at its core was a fully developed system of theories, techniques, and technical terms which the student had to learn together with a repertoire of compositions (Volk 2006). The complex theoretical underpinnings of Mesopotamian music are known in part from textual sources, which describe a heptatonic scale, with seven pitches per octave, specifically the diatonic scale (from Greek *διατονικός* '[progressing] through tones', also known as *heptatonia prima*), a seven-note musical scale comprising five whole steps and two half steps. The texts also give the names of nine chords and instructions for tuning instruments in intervals. Such instructions are rare, as the advanced students who used them normally had no need for written directions; but they demonstrate that Mesopotamian musicians of the second millennium BC employed elements of the system which later came to be known as Pythagorean tuning, using just intervals of the circle of fifths (Volk 2006: 38–43). Musical notes were not usually recorded in writing, and possible annotations of notes by vowel-signs are not yet properly understood. One cuneiform text provides us with the exact intervals needed to perform the composition today, a Hurrian song recorded on a tablet from 14th-century Ugarit (Krispijn 2002: 474–475, 479). While these texts are of immense importance and interest for the history of music theory, Mesopotamian musicians generally worked without them: as part of an uninterrupted tradition, they did not need musical notation or other written instructions in order to perform compositions that might already have been millennia old.

Musical education

Those who mastered music and its techniques were worthy of admiration. King Šulgi of Ur claimed for himself wide-ranging musical proficiency in a Sumerian song of self-praise:

> I, Šulgi, king of Ur, have also devoted myself to the art of music. Nothing is too complicated for me; I know the full extent of the *tigi*- and the *adab*-compositions, the perfection of the art of music. When I fix the frets on the lute, which enraptures my heart, I never damage its neck; I have devised rules for raising and lowering its intervals. On the (instrument with the) eleven strings (gu-uš), the lyre, I know the melodious tuning. I am familiar with the three-string lute (sa-eš) and with drumming on its musical sound box. I can take in my hands the Mari lyre which causes

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> the house to be silent. I know the finger technique of the *algar*-harp, the instrument from Sabum, a royal creation. In the same way I can produce sounds from the lyre of (mythical king) Ur-Zababa, the *harhar*-lyre, the Anatolian lyre, the lion lute and 'boatman's pole' lute. Even if they bring to me, as one might to a skilled musician, a musical instrument that I have not heard before, when I strike it up I make its true sound known; I am able to handle it just like something that has been in my hands before. Tuning, stringing, unstringing and fastening are not beyond my skills. I do not make the reed pipe sound like a rustic pipe, and on my own initiative I can wail a *šumunša*-song or make a lament as well as anyone who does it regularly. (Šulgi B, ll. 154–174 = ETCSL 2.4.2.02; cf. Krispijn 2002: 466–467)

It remains unclear how comprehensive Šulgi's knowledge and skills really were (Krispijn 1990; Volk 2006: 43) but it is well documented that acquiring a certain level of theoretical and practical music knowledge was indeed part of royal education, just as princes and princesses were required to learn how to read and write (Charpin 2010; Zamazalová in this volume).

But this royal training only mirrored the education received by lesser members of the urban elites: a bilingual composition in the guise of a fictional exam has the teacher question the student about different types of song and their configuration (Krispijn 2002: 466). Students received their musical education directly from a practising musician, usually in a private household. Several different forms of training relationships are attested, ranging from the teaching of one's own natural or adopted children to that of paying students, including slaves (Ziegler 2009). Blind children seem to have been sent for musical training as a matter of course, and an Old Babylonian contract for the training of a blind girl survives (Szlechter 1963: II no. 151(UMM G 40); cf. Cohen and Kedar in this volume). Blind musicians were so popular that king Yasmah-Addu of Mari even had children with normal eyesight blinded before having them trained as musicians by Ilšu-ibbišu—apparently an experiment, as we assume that normally only people born blind were deemed fit for a career in music (Ziegler 2007: 21–23). Further written contracts for a musical education are attested for the second and the first millennium BC, with an Old Babylonian model contract providing the most detail on the training to be received over seven lessons:

> Hebe-Eridu son of Adad-lamassi sat with Il-ṣiri in order to learn music. At that time, Adad-lamassi paid Il-ṣiri five shekels of silver in order (for Hebe-Eridu) to study singing and (playing) the *tigidlu*-, *asila*-, *tigi*- and *adab*-instruments seven times. (Geller 2003)

Musical training could require the apprentice to travel. On one such study trip undertaken with their students, two singers (*zammerum*) wrote the following report to their king and patron, Yasmah-Addu of Mari:

> Ṭab-eli-matišu does not withhold any teaching. Thus he spoke to us: 'I want to rehearse (the composition) *e-ri-iš me ma-ah ša-ra ba*.' […] Furthermore, he does not neglect them in any way! And this chant *e-ri-iš me ma-ah ša-ra ba*, they have not yet (learned) completely. (Ziegler 2007: no. 64, ll. 6–10, 16–20)

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As we have seen from our Mari case study and from the case of Inana-mansum at Sippar-Amnanum, chief musicians and lamenters-in-chief were among the musicians who trained children in musical skills and turned them into professional musicians. They tended to see them as their dependents, completely under their authority. Therefore Ibbi-Ilabrat, Samsi-Addu's chief musician, wrote to Yasmah-Addu about the appointment of his former student Ilšu-ibbišu to the post of Mari's chief musical instructor: 'I have given you Ilšu-ibbišu and his girls (= female musicians) as a present' (Ziegler 2007: no. 32).

Some teachers liked to remind their former students of their school days, in the expectation of demonstrations of loyalty and gratitude. The following Old Babylonian letter from Isin was written by a lamenter in answer to such a reminder from his old teacher:

> In regard to what [you wrote to me] in a letter: 'I [brought] you into the world, I raised you and I even [supported] your father!' You write to me that I [would not know] that you brought me into the world and that you raised me and that you even supported my father. (But I know well that) you raised me, [...], you taught me the craft of the lamenter from when I was little until [I reached adulthood]. (Wilcke 1985: 189–190)

But these school days could be hard and are described as a period full of privations in literary compositions (Powell 1978). Some ancient sources even rank the musical arts higher than the scribal arts, normally seen as the pinnacle of erudition, although others give the scribe pre-eminence over the lamenter (Alster 1997: no. 2.54).

Employment and social status

Educated musicians were highly valued specialists who could easily find employment at the various palaces or temples of Mesopotamia, and probably also abroad if we bear in mind how sought-after foreign musicians were at the Mesopotamian courts. Whether in royal or temple service, trained musicians could expect to be permanently supplied with land, rations, or prebends.

The available sources offer no clues as to whether there were also less accomplished, less specialized musicians who made a living by performing in taverns or by rendering occasional services to private employers on events such as weddings, but this would seem to be very likely; at least certain jesters (*aluzinnum*) were also tavern keepers (Durand 1982; Shehata 2009b: 52–54). While we have already mentioned depictions showing musicians as individuals of high social status, they could also be portrayed as starvelings on the fringe of respectability: some Old Babylonian clay plaques show haggard lute players, others musicians in the company of monkeys (Spycket 1998), dogs, and pigs (Eichmann 1997). Some female musicians, especially the *kezertum* women, whom we have earlier identified as percussionists using the *tigi* drum, could be classified as prostitutes. A humorous Sumerian poem deals with the sad fate of a family that fell from society's grace and drifted into the demimonde of music (Shehata 2007). Three generations of this family's

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women behaved like prostitutes while the male protagonist, a trained musician performing with the *tigi* and *zamzam* instruments, starts out enjoying a world of material wealth before he descends into poverty. This poem also illustrates that musicians tended to belong to families of musicians, with sons and daughters receiving musical training as a matter of course. There is good evidence for intermarriage between families of musicians but this phenomenon is common in all areas of Mesopotamian society.

We may assume that the musical scene in each Mesopotamian city had its own local characteristics, its own hierarchy of musicians, with particular conventions for training, repertoire, and instruments. Musical instruments came with certain connotations: some were reserved for women, others for men; some were used by beginners, others by experts; some were considered noble, especially lyres, harps, and certain drums, which could become deities in their own right, while others were held in little esteem, such as flutes and pipes. A popular saying could not be clearer: 'A disgraced musician becomes a piper, a disgraced lamentation-singer becomes a flutist!' (Alster 1997: no. 2.54).

The world of music allowed for greater personal freedom and was less bound by the conventions usually governing society. Difference, whether due to origin, sexuality (Gabbay 2007), or physical disadvantages, did not entail a musician's marginalization but, on the contrary, furthered interest in and admiration for their art. This is most obvious in the case of the popular blind musicians. In general, musicians were not perceived as fringe members of society and if they were different this was accepted.

Conclusion

While we have focused on the world of professional music, the people of Mesopotamia of course habitually brightened their lives with their own singing and playing: songs told of love and adventure, gave rhythm to repetitive chores or marching. Lullabies were not only used in the incantation rituals for which they were written down but served primarily to sing babies to sleep (Farber 1989). Prayers were sung, as were dirges for mourning. While palaces and temples housed musical instruments of the highest craftsmanship, value, and antiquity, simpler versions and other, more rustic instruments circulated elsewhere. Lutes and flutes were widespread according to the textual evidence, while rattles have been found in high numbers in excavations. Music was not only the preserve of professionals and the highly educated; it was an important element of every Mesopotamian's cultural experience.

Further reading

While Ziegler (2007) deals specifically with the musical establishment of the royal palace of Mari, and Shehata (2009b) is especially concerned with musicians and vocal music from the first half of the second millennium, the contributions by Kilmer (1993–97; 1995), Krispijn

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(2002), and Volk (2006) provide more general surveys of Ancient Near Eastern music and musical performance.

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CHAPTER 15

THE EDUCATION OF NEO-ASSYRIAN PRINCES

SILVIE ZAMAZALOVÁ

The ideology of kingship in the ancient Near East tended to perceive the ruler as a representative of the gods, chosen to maintain the divine order on earth. In order to be worthy of such a responsibility and to justify his position as the absolute ruler of his earthly domain, the ideal king needed to exhibit unique physical perfection and mental balance. The Assyrian king was no exception; according to a Neo-Assyrian literary composition about the creation of man, he was created as a being quite distinct from, and naturally superior to, ordinary man:

> Ea (god of wisdom) opened his mouth to speak, saying a word to Belet-ili (goddess of creation): 'You are Belet-ili, the sister of the great gods; it was you who created man, the human (*lullû amēlu*). Fashion now the king, the counsellor man (*šarru māliku amēlu*)! Gird the whole of his figure so pleasingly, make perfect his countenance and well formed his body!' And Belet-ili fashioned the king, the counsellor man. (Mayer 1987: VS 24 92, ll. 31′–36′; cf. Radner 2010: 15)

It was, nevertheless, an inescapable fact that, despite his divine favour and unique qualities, the future king was not born fully formed, and that instruction and training were required in order to prepare him for his role. This chapter examines the way in which the reconciliation of the ideal with reality was accomplished, focusing on the education received by male members of a ruling house, whether or not they eventually acceded to the throne. 'Education' is to be understood broadly as preparation for kingship, and may include the imparting of practical skills as well as more traditional scholarly knowledge.

Our principal case study is the Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c.* 630 BC). Born as the third eldest son of king Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC), Assurbanipal's rise to power began in 672 BC when he replaced his elder brother Sin-nadin-apli as crown prince of Assyria, probably as a result of Sin-nadin-apli's untimely death (Weissert 1998: 161). Assurbanipal became king of Assyria shortly after his father's death in 669 BC while another elder brother, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, assumed the throne of Babylonia (Fincke 2003–04: 119).

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Assurbanipal is a good subject for two reasons. Firstly, the Sargonid period (721–609 BC), and Assurbanipal's reign in particular, has provided scholars with abundant source materials. These include inscriptions, administrative documents, visual sources such as the magnificent reliefs uncovered in Assurbanipal's capital Nineveh, and extensive correspondence between the royal family and their advisors. Secondly, Assurbanipal was one of the few rulers to refer specifically to the education he received in his youth, and to lay specific claims to literacy as opposed to general wisdom (Livingstone 2007: 98). Of particular interest in this context is the autobiographical inscription known as L^4. The discovery of Assurbanipal's library in Nineveh in the mid-19th century (Damrosch 2007: 81–114) has fuelled scholars' interest in these claims, which have frequently been taken more or less at face value and used to promote the image of Assurbanipal as a scholar-king, unique among the usually illiterate Mesopotamian rulers (e.g. Reade 1998: 49). To provide a more balanced picture and place Assurbanipal's learnedness in a wider historical context, the chapter therefore draws on a broad range of additional sources from the Sargonid period.

'The lore of the sage Adapa': Assurbanipal's education according to a royal inscription

The inscription today known as L^4 was discovered in Nineveh, the administrative capital of Assyria under Assurbanipal and his predecessors Esarhaddon and Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC), located beside the river Tigris in what is now northern Iraq (Reade 1998: 6). The text of the tablet (broken into two fragments, K 2694 and K 3050, now in the British Museum—see Figure 15.1) was to be inscribed on a stela to commemorate the return of the statue of the god Marduk to Babylon. It can be dated to 668 BC, shortly after Assurbanipal's accession to the throne (Villard 1997: 136).

Although the cuneiform text has been the subject of several editions, advances in Assyriology since the date of the most recent edition (1926) have rendered much of these early translations out of date, while more recent publications have only translated parts of the inscription, primarily the passages focusing on Assurbanipal's scribal education (e.g. Villard 1997; Frame and George 2005; Livingstone 2007; Fincke 2003–04). For our purposes, it is useful to begin with an updated translation of the complete section pertinent to the issue of royal education.

> [1] …of Babylon, king…, [2] grandson of Sennacherib, king [of the world, king of Assyria], [3] great-grandson of Sargon, great king […of Assy]ria, [4] governor of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad. [5] Aššur, the father of the gods, [bestowed on me] a destiny of kingship (while still) in my mother's womb. [6] Mullissu, the great mother, called [my name] for the rule of the land and the people. [7] Ea (and) Belet-ili made (my) figure into the perfect image of a lord. [8] Sin, the radiant god, repeatedly revealed favourable

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FIGURE 15.1 Obverse of a clay tablet bearing inscription L[4]. British Museum, K 2694 + K 3050.) (Photo © Trustees of the British Museum, from the British Museum's website (http://tinyurl.com/3avjgh2).

signs concerning the exercise of my kingship. [9] Šamaš (and) Adad entrusted to me (the art of) extispicy, the message which cannot be altered. [10] Marduk, the sage of the gods, gave to me as a gift broad understanding and great wisdom. [11] Nabu, the scribe of the universe, made me a present of the precepts of his sagacity. [12] Ninurta (and) Nergal endowed my physique with manly vigour (and) unrivalled strength. [13] I learnt the lore of the wise sage Adapa, the hidden secret of all scribal art. [14] I can recognize celestial and terrestrial omens (and) discuss (them) in the assembly of the scholars. [15] I can deliberate upon (the series) '(If) the liver is a mirror (image) of heaven' with able experts in oil divination. [16] I can solve complicated multiplications and divisions which do not have an (obvious) solution. [17] I have studied elaborate composition(s) in obscure Sumerian (and) Akkadian which are difficult to get right. [18] I have inspected cuneiform sign(s) on stones from before the flood, which are cryptic, impenetrable (and) muddled up. [19] This is what I did all of my days with a select companion: [20] I

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> cantered on thoroughbreds (and) rode spirited purebreds. [21] I grasped the bow (and) let fly the arrow, as befits valour. [22] I threw quivering lances as if they were darts. [23] I held the reins (and) like a charioteer I made the wheels turn.[24] Like a craftsman I shaped *arītu* and *kabābu* shields. [25] I mastered the great technical lore of every single expert. [26] At the same time, I was learning (behaviour) befitting a ruler (and) I acted all the time like a king. [27] I stood before the king, my creator, giving orders to the nobles. [28] Without my knowledge, no governor was appointed; no commander was assigned without me. [29] The father, my creator, gazed upon the heroism which the great gods had bequeathed to me. [30] By the command of the great gods, he felt a great love for me in the assembly of my [*eld*]*er* brothers.

The text of inscription L^4 makes a distinction between wisdom and knowledge received directly from the gods (what I shall refer to as 'received wisdom') and that acquired through Assurbanipal's own process of learning ('acquired knowledge'). The former might be considered an inherent part of the perfect man which all Assyrian kings were expected to be: as part of his future role, the gods endowed him with certain skills necessary to carry out that role. Others, however, the future king had to learn for himself, with the assistance of non-divine teachers. This dual process reflected the ideology of the king as divinely chosen and divinely inspired while at the same time recognizing the reality of his human nature.

The list of skills transmitted directly by the gods, the 'received wisdom', is comparatively brief and the skills themselves general. The notable exception is Šamaš's and Adad's gift of extispicy, referred to again further on as part of the 'acquired knowledge'. While its mention here may be motivated by the close connection with the gods in question, it may also signal the perceived importance of extispicy. The dominant quality is wisdom, bestowed on Assurbanipal by both Marduk and Nabu and complemented by the physical strength and virility expected of a commander-in-chief. The 'received wisdom' provided a general platform for the acquisition of more specialized knowledge.

The transition from received wisdom to acquired knowledge is marked by a clear change of subject. Assurbanipal progresses from being the passive recipient of divine wisdom ('Marduk…gave to me as a gift…') to playing an active part in its acquisition ('I learnt the lore of the sage Adapa…I can recognize celestial and terrestrial omens…'). That far more space is devoted to this than to skills received from the gods is perhaps an indication of the pride that Assurbanipal took in those achievements which were the result of his own hard work. While the need for instruction emphasizes his human aspect, his effortless superiority in every discipline serves as a reminder of his divine favour. He is no ordinary student. The education is loosely divided into three themes: scribal disciplines, the art of war, and the art of government.

The elements of the basic scribal education, such as forming clay tablets, handling the stylus, and mastering wordlists and literary texts (Gesche 2001), are not mentioned explicitly but are implied through Assurbanipal's mastery of the more advanced subjects. 'The lore of the sage Adapa' refers to *āšipūtu*, the practice of exorcism or magic as a method of healing, and using rituals and prayers to combat various supernatural forces,

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including malevolent forces responsible for physical ailments (see Schwemer in this volume). The 'celestial and terrestrial omens' refer to the Mesopotamian practice of observing the world at large in order to discern the gods' intentions (see Koch and Rochberg in this volume).

The omen series '(If) the liver is a mirror image of heaven', which has been identified as belonging to the extispicy corpus (Villard 1997: 138), is referenced by name, specifically highlighting Assurbanipal's expertise in interpreting omina gained from studying a sheep's liver (see Koch in this volume). There is independent evidence supporting Assurbanipal's claim to have an understanding of celestial omina as a letter from one of his astrologers implies that the king was indeed able to consult the astronomical compendium *Enūma Anu Enlil* personally (Parpola 1993: no. 110; Villard 1997: 145). The bilingual Sumerian–Akkadian texts mentioned in inscription L^4 are most likely to have included the hymns and chants performed by the lamentation priests (*kalû*) in Sumerian (see Löhnert in this volume). Assurbanipal also claims to have mastered mathematics (see Chambon in this volume), including performing complicated calculations whose solutions were not recorded in existing mathematical tables, as implied by their lack of a 'solution'; by this, he would seem to refer to divisions which do not come out evenly.

In addition to all this, inscription L^4 stresses that Assurbanipal's days were spent practising the skills which were needed to lead the Assyrian army. These were not limited to the roles which he himself would one day perform; Assurbanipal claims to have mastered 'the great technical lore of every single expert', from charioteer to shield-maker, alongside more traditional royal skills such as horse-riding and archery. It appears that the aim of such an education was to become familiar with all the elements of the great battle machine. In a later version of his annals, Prism F, Assurbanipal says of his education, 'I know how to wage war and battle; I have been shown (how to set up) battle line(s) and (do) combat' (Fincke 2003–04, 120 n. 75). The implication is that he progressed from specific skills to more general strategy and tactics but had done so only after inscription L^4 had been composed (Villard 1997: 140).

That Assurbanipal participated in horse-riding and archery is corroborated by a fragmentary letter from an exorcist with advice to avoid these pursuits which put his life at risk, certainly in reaction to an omen which was interpreted to signify danger for the crown prince: 'The crown prin[ce, my lord], should not ride a horse, nor should he [draw] a bow. (However), let him do as [he] deems best' (Parpola 1993: no. 192; also Villard 1997: 144). According to inscription L^4, his physical education was shared by a select companion' (*illu nasqu*). Since an *illu* is a member of a closed group, Assurbanipal's companion probably belonged to the élite and may even have been a relative of his (Villard 1997: 144). The training may have taken place at Tarbiṣu, situated to the north of Nineveh and the site of a palace built by Esarhaddon 'for the leisure of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince' (Villard 1997: 144 n. 59). This expression appears in numerous epigraphs accompanying depictions on the Nineveh palace reliefs of Assurbanipal on the hunt, suggesting a link between the palace and Assurbanipal's physical activities, including the lion hunts discussed below (Villard 1997: 144; and Weissert 1997: 342). It seems, therefore, that the crown prince's physical and intellectual instruction was split, each one taking

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place in a different location at a different time, presumably supervised by separate teams of teachers (Villard 1997: 144).

In addition to the advanced scribal education and his training in the arts of war, if inscription L[4] is to be trusted, Assurbanipal was closely involved in the government of Assyria (Villard 1997: 141), with a say in both the political and military spheres: 'NO governor was appointed; no commander was assigned without me'. It has been argued that Assurbanipal's political involvement was not the consequence of his appointment as crown prince but its cause, and that this passage refers not to his education as crown prince but to political machinations with which he secured the supporters he needed to prepare his rise to power (Fincke 2003–04: 119 n. 65). While an intriguing possibility, this interpretation is not supported by the inscription; the lines in question immediately follow Assurbanipal's assertion that he was learning behaviour befitting a king, surely the sole preserve of the designated crown prince.

How reliable are Assurbanipal's claims?

While royal inscriptions are an important historical source, they must be approached with caution since their primary purpose is the celebration of the king's perfection. We must therefore turn to other sources in order to get a more balanced picture. Alasdair Livingstone (2007: 106–107) has brought up some evidence in support of Assurbanipal's literacy. One fragmentary letter from the Nineveh archives begins, 'To the king, my lord, your servant Assurbanipal. Good health to the king, my lord. May Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my lord!' (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002: no. 19). The letter's lack of a subject, together with its rather clumsy script and unusually simplistic orthography, indicates that it may have been written by Assurbanipal himself in the course of his scribal training.

A number of colophons on tablets from Nineveh contain expressions such as 'for my review in perusing', 'for study in his reading', or 'for my examining'. In all cases, the personal pronouns refer to Assurbanipal, and it has been suggested that such tablets were intended for his personal study (Lieberman 1990: 318–319). Another colophon states, 'Assurbanipal, great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria …I have written, checked and collated this tablet among the assembly of the scholars (*ummânū*) according to the wording on tablets (and) writing-boards' (Frame and George 2005: 280; note that *ummânū* can also mean 'teachers'). Livingstone (2007: 114) has argued that such colophons must have been written by the king since no scribe would have dared to proclaim 'I am Assurbanipal', and refers to a provincial official whose attempt to name his son Assurbanipal resulted in punishment by river ordeal (Kataja 1987: 65–68). However, the two situations are not alike: scribes commonly wrote on behalf of their royal masters or recorded their words. Nevertheless, the colophons provide persuasive, if not conclusive, evidence for Assurbanipal's literacy and scholarly interests.

The correspondence between Assurbanipal and his scholars casts some doubt on his claims of unrivalled scholarly knowledge. For instance, some letters contain glosses

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which give the reading of certain signs or provide synonyms, as in the following example: 'The said house will have *išdihu*. *Išdihu* (means) profit' (Parpola 1993: no. 58; on the use of glosses, see Talon 2003). Such glosses were probably designed to be more than mere aids to Assurbanipal's reading; their analysis points to their use as teaching devices, explaining difficult concepts and sometimes using them as a springboard for elaboration. Alternatively, the glosses may have been intended as aids for the royal secretaries (Villard 1997: 145 n. 72, 148).

Elsewhere, the king fails to understand his exorcist's use of the specialist term *miqit šamê*, 'what has fallen from heaven', to refer to epilepsy, enquiring naïvely, '"Fall of the heavens." What is this? The heavens exist forever' (Parpola 1993: no. 295; see also Fincke 2003–04: 121). The inescapable conclusion is that Assurbanipal's erudition remained inferior to that of the professional scholars in his employ, not surprisingly so given their specialism and the king's need to divide his attention among many matters. That such situations required a certain amount of tact on the part of the scholars is shown by the following letter from Assurbanipal's tutor, Balasi, in which the king's confusion is explained away by the scribe's lack of understanding and the difficult nature of the omen series in question:

> Concerning the tab[let] of (the omen series) *Šumma Izbu* [about which] the king, my lord, wrote to me: 'Look (at it)! [Who would] write [...] in *Šumma Izbu*?'—there is a particular tablet [in] which the [...]s are written, and I am now sending it to the king. The king should have a look. Maybe the scribe who reads to the king did not understand.
>
> *Šumma Izbu* is difficult to interpret. The first time that I come before the king, my lord, I shall (personally) show, with this tablet that I am sending to the king, my lord, how the omen is written. Really, [the one] who has [not] had (the meaning) pointed out to him cannot possibly understand it. (Parpola 1993: no. 60)

Incidentally, the letter shows that literacy did not preclude Assurbanipal from relying on others to read his correspondence for him, and implies a continuing dialogue between Assurbanipal and his tutor, both in writing and face to face.

Let us now turn our attention to Assurbanipal's teachers. Nothing is known of the identity of Assurbanipal's tutors prior to about 671 BC, when Esarhaddon appointed his astrologer Balasi to be the crown prince's tutor and chief scholar, as evidenced by the following letter from Balasi: 'To whom indeed has the king done such a favour as to me whom you have appointed to the service of the crown prince, to be his *ummânu* and to teach him?' (Parpola 1993: no. 39). That Balasi enjoyed a close relationship with Esarhaddon is clear from a letter in which he and a fellow scholar urge the king to break his fast, concluding, 'We became worried and were afraid, and that is why we are (now) writing to the king' (Parpola 1993: no. 43).

Scholars played a prominent part at the Neo-Assyrian court, providing guidance and helping to ensure that the king acted in accordance with divine will at all times. The most respected of these scholars made up the 'inner circle', a select group of multi-disciplinary experts engaged in regular correspondence with the king. Recruited from this 'inner

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circle' was the king's personal *ummânu*, whose position was the equivalent of the antediluvian sages, *apkallū*, and whose role it was to maintain and interpret divine wisdom (Parpola 1993: xvii–xxvi). The prestige and influence of the *ummânū* is illustrated by the fact that several king lists record kings with their *ummânū* (Grayson 1980: 116–125; cf. Kuhrt 1995: 524), and a literary composition copied for Assurbanipal's library and known today as *Advice to a Prince* warns that 'If [the king] has no regard for scholarly advisors, his land will rebel against him' (Foster 2005: 867).

Balasi's appointment thus put him in a unique position vis-à-vis the crown prince. The polysemous designation *ummânu* was particularly apt in this case, as Balasi was appointed as both scholar and teacher. The expression used in Parpola (1993: no. 39), *liginna qabû*, means 'to recite a school exercise tablet', since tablets of the *liginnu* type were employed as part of the scribal curriculum (Villard 1997: 142 n. 45). The numerous glosses in Balasi's letters to Assurbanipal suggest that his teaching went far beyond rudimentary reading and writing, and that he took his teaching role seriously. Despite his appointment, Balasi remained part of the entourage of the king, and was thus an important link between the king and his crown prince, with the experience necessary to help Assurbanipal prepare for rule and provide guidance after his succession. It also seems that Balasi was involved in the training of scribal apprentices at the palace (Parpola 1993: no. 385), and thus helped to shape the next generation of *ummânū*.

Whether Balasi was responsible for encouraging Assurbanipal's interest in scholarship, or whether he was appointed because his interests aligned with those of his young charge, we may never know, but the surviving correspondence attests to the fruitful nature of their relationship. It seems likely that Assurbanipal was influenced not only by individual scholars such as Balasi but also by the general emphasis on scholarship at Esarhaddon's court.

The House of Succession

A number of sources make it clear that, in the 7th century BC at least, the crown prince resided in the *bēt redûti*, literally 'House of Succession', while awaiting, and preparing for, kingship (Kuhrt 1995: 521). The close association between crown princeship and the House of Succession is reflected in the official titles bestowed on Assurbanipal and his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin as heirs to Assyria and Babylonia respectively: 'Great crown prince of the House of Succession of Assyria' and 'crown prince of the House of Succession of Babylon' (Weissert 1998: 163). The designation *bēt redûti* thus appears to have transcended a purely physical location but, in Assurbanipal's case at least, also referred to his actual residence. The description of this residence in inscription L^4 is sparse; it is merely stated that Assurbanipal 'entered the House of Succession, the place of decision and counsel' (Lehmann-Haupt 1892: 24). A later inscription, known today as the Rassam Prism, is more explicit:

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> With joy and celebration I entered the House of Succession, the sophisticated place, the centre of royalty in which Sennacherib, the father of the father, my creator, practised princeship and kingship; the place in which Esarhaddon, the father, my creator, was born and grew up (and) practised the lordship of Assyria, controlled all the princes, extended the family, gathered (his) relatives and family; and wherein I, Assurbanipal, learned the wisdom of Nabu, laid hold of scribal practices of all the experts, as many as there are, examined their instructions, learned to shoot the bow, ride horses and chariots, and hold the reins. (Melville 2006: 363)

The crown prince had his own staff of advisors, doctors and scholars. Writing to Esarhaddon, his chief exorcist says, 'Remutu, the [exorcist] who is in the service of the crown prince, is ill. Nabu-riba-ahu, Šumaya son of Nabu-zeru-[lešir], Urad-Gula, Nabu-le'uti, [Be]l-naṣir: anyone of [the]se bearded courtiers [whom] the king, my lord, might choose can (fill his post and) serve the crown prince' (Parpola 1993: no. 257). The crown prince's staff apparently included his own exorcist, although he appears to have been heavily outnumbered by the exorcists in the king's employ. It also appears from the letter that staffing decisions relating to the House of Succession were the responsibility of the king rather than the crown prince.

It remains unclear whether Assurbanipal's education began only after his appointment or whether he had already received some instruction at that point. In inscription L[4], the description of Assurbanipal's education precedes the reference to his entrance into the House of Succession, and some have taken this order literally (e.g. Fincke 2003–04: 119 n. 65). Other inscriptions, such as the Rassam Prism or Prism F (Villard 1997: 138 n. 19), explicitly state that Assurbanipal's entire education took place in the House of Succession, although these claims may have been motivated by a desire to reinforce the fiction of Assurbanipal's predestination for kingship. Alluding to a life before his appointment would merely detract from his divinely sanctioned destiny. Two further issues may elucidate this question: the extent to which education was available to those royal children not destined for the throne (see 'Who else received a royal education?' below) and Assurbanipal's age when appointed as crown prince.

The date of Assurbanipal's birth is unknown, but it is likely that he was in his teens when appointed as crown prince. The appointment seems to have coincided with Assurbanipal's marriage, and the wording of a letter (Parpola 1993: no. 185) in which one of Esarhaddon's exorcists recommends the marriage implies that Assurbanipal and his wife were old enough to fulfil the purpose of such a union, namely the creation of an heir. There is no suggestion that the marriage was motivated by purely political considerations which would render the couple's ages irrelevant.

In addition, the loyalty oaths (*adê*) which Esarhaddon imposed on his subjects shortly after Assurbanipal's appointment include the following provision which indicates that his sons were still young: 'If Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, passes away during the minority of his sons' (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: no. 6; see also Villard 1997: 135 n. 3). Moreover, the fact that the *adê* imposed on Assurbanipal's succession were organized by his paternal grandmother, Naqia (also known as Zakutu; Parpola and Watanabe 1988: no. 8), implies that Assurbanipal himself was not old enough to have dispensed with such assistance.

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Although the crown prince and the king were in regular contact, their movements and personal contact were, at times at least, subject to ritual considerations and divinatory approval (Villard 1997: 141), as the following letter to Esarhaddon from one of his scholars attests:

> As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: 'Is this month good? The crown prince should visit me—when would it be good?' In case he is accompanying the king to the Inner City, Šabaṭu (XI) is a good month and the 17th is a good day. [Let] the crown prince ent[er] into the king, [my lord]'s presence. (Parpola 1993: no. 190)

The surviving correspondence shows that, in the absence of direct physical contact (whether for ritual or practical reasons), the king and the crown prince kept in touch through letters.

There is evidence that crown princes were involved in matters of government in order to prepare for their future role, as described by Assurbanipal in inscription L[4]. Another Assyrian crown prince, Sennacherib, was responsible for the security of Assyria's northern frontier, coordinating intelligence reports and keeping his royal father, Sargon II (r. 721–705 BC), informed of the latest developments, as well as dealing with a range of other matters: receiving emissaries, recording tribute, commanding the royal guardsmen, receiving trees for the royal orchards, and generally carrying out the king's orders (Parpola 1987: nos. 29–40, 152; Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: no. 281; see also Kuhrt 1995: 522). The correspondence between Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–727 BC) and his crown prince, Ululayu, the later king Shalmaneser V (r. 726–722 BC), deals with similar matters (Radner 2003–04). The frequent requests for specific instructions (e.g. Parpola 1987: no. 37: 'What exactly does the king, my lord, order?') and references to previously received communications suggest that the crown prince's actions were supervised by the king, although he did exercise a degree of autonomy and certainly outranked the so-called 'magnates', the highest military and administrative officials of the Assyrian empire. Nevertheless, the exact degree of his autonomy is difficult to gauge given the incomplete nature of the surviving correspondence and the fact that it less likely to record decisions requiring no input from the king.

It seems that Assurbanipal played a similarly active role. It may have been particularly important for Esarhaddon to have the support of an able (and able-bodied) successor given his own poor health, not only to help ease the burden of government but also to provide a figure more in keeping with the ideology of the perfect ruler. One imagines that the crown prince took on a particularly vital role while the king was away from Assyria, as Esarhaddon was for four months during his campaign against Egypt in 671 BC (Livingstone 2007: 102). In any event, one letter shows Assurbanipal playing an active role in the defence of the empire, ordering garrisons stationed along the frontier to send fugitives to him for interrogation (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002: no. 148; see Radner 2008: 502–503), while others illustrate his involvement in the cultic sphere, as when he communicates with temple personnel about an upcoming festival or receives their petitions (Cole and Machinist 1998: nos. 78, 154, 158).

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In inscription L[4], Assurbanipal claims to have had a say in the appointment of political and military staff. However, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of Assurbanipal's involvement. The expressions used, *balū'a* and *ullânū'a*, can be translated as 'without me' or 'without my permission/knowledge/collaboration'. Was Assurbanipal actively involved in decisions, did he play the more passive role of an observer, or did the truth lie somewhere in between? The sources certainly suggest that he did far more than shadow his father, but the fragmentary nature of the evidence makes it difficult to define his role with certainty.

Who else received a royal education?

Assyrian kings were habitually compared to the mythical sages, half man, half fish (*apkallū*), with Adapa being the first and by far the most prominent among them. The earliest evidence for these comparisons dates to the reign of Sargon II, who describes himself in an inscription as 'the wise king, master of all crafts, the equal of an *apkallu*', while his successor Sennacherib boasts in another inscription, '(Ea, the god of wisdom) has given me a very broad understanding, the equal of Adapa the *apkallu*, (and) has made me a gift of great wisdom' (Villard 1997: 139 n. 26). Assurbanipal himself is described with unprecedented extravagance as 'an offspring of an *apkallu* and Adapa' who has 'surpassed the wisdom of the Abyss [i.e. the *apsû*, the abode of the *apkallū* and their patron Ea] and all scholarship' (Parpola 1993: no. 174). While it is tempting to interpret this as evidence of literacy and scholarly education, it may have been nothing more than flattery required by the royal ideology of kingly perfection. The dearth of relevant sources from the reigns of Sargon and Sennacherib makes it impossible to leave the realm of mere speculation (Villard 1997: 139).

The passage in Assurbanipal's Rassam Prism quoted above makes no mention of any education received in the House of Succession by Esarhaddon or Sennacherib, although both practised princeship and kingship there. We should not make too much of this: the reference to Esarhaddon and Sennacherib is intended primarily to provide a historical context for Assurbanipal as the maintainer of the Sargonid line. Apart from the fact that Assurbanipal makes an explicit connection between the House of Succession and princely education (a connection which may have been equally true in his predecessors' time), there is extraneous evidence to suggest that Assurbanipal's ancestors had received scribal training.

In a letter to Esarhaddon, the exorcist Marduk-šakin-šumi compliments the king as follows: 'Concerning the writing of the king, my lord, Keni (scribe of the crown prince, see Villard 1997: 143 n. 50) will die of envy when he sees it; Bel and Nabu have given a fine hand to the king, my lord' (Parpola 1993: no. 235). Although this is the sort of exaggerated flattery we find in royal correspondence throughout the ages, it must have contained at least an element of truth in order to be convincing. In other words, the king must have had a written hand of some sort, and a sufficiently advanced one to have borne some

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comparison with that of a professional, albeit through the generous eyes of a courtier eager to please. The fact that Esarhaddon, the king, apparently put stylus to clay himself suggests that when he wrote he did so for pleasure, since a king certainly had no need to be his own amanuensis. The letter lends credence to an inscription of Esarhaddon as crown prince, which describes him as someone 'whose mind has learned thoroughly [...] of the whole of the scribal craft' (Villard 1997: 139 n. 25).

There is some evidence for the systematic education of royal children at the Neo-Assyrian court. The most interesting source is a letter from Esarhaddon's eldest daughter, Šerua-eṭirat, to Assurbanipal's wife, Libbali-šarrat (see Figure 15.2). Livingstone's (2007: 104) recent translation is worth quoting in full:

> Why don't you write your tablets and recite your exercise, or people will say 'Is this the sister of Šerua-eṭirat, the eldest daughter of the succession palace of Aššur-etel-ilani-mukinni, the great king, the legitimate king, king of the world, king of Assyria?' And you are a daughter-in-law, the lady of the house of Assurbanipal, the great crown prince of the House of Succession of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria.

It is clear that Libbali-šarrat was expected to study, to practise reading and writing. If this was the case, it seems likely that other young royals were expected to do the same (Livingstone 2007, 105), although Libbali-šarrat's educational aspirations might arguably be attributed to her husband's encouragement. Nevertheless, by specifically evoking her own relationship with Libbali-šarrat, Šerua-eṭirat implies that she herself may have been educated, since she appears to link literacy with prestige: if it was expected of one sister, 'a daughter-in-law', why not the other, 'the eldest daughter'? There was no practical reason for Šerua-eṭirat to receive a scribal education: women other than the queen were not normally involved in state administration, and professional scribes were on hand to meet her secretarial needs. Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that some education, covering in the very least the ability to read and write, was expected of senior members of the royal family regardless of their gender.

Livingstone has adduced further evidence in the shape of a letter from Nineveh written to Assurbanipal by an unnamed brother. The letter exhibits characteristics not usually seen in the work of a professional scribe, notably an odd shape and large, widely-spaced cuneiform signs, suggesting that it may have been written by the brother in question while he was still learning to write (Livingstone 2007: 105–106). Another brother of Assurbanipal, Aššur-mukin-pale'a, is known to have possessed a fine collection of scholarly tablets, some of which were eventually incorporated into Assurbanipal's library—a persuasive indication of his own literacy (Villard 1997: 139).

Since schooling normally began at an early age, it seems reasonable to conclude that Assurbanipal had already received some education by the time he was appointed crown prince, possibly originally as preparation for a priestly function comparable to that held by some of his brothers (Livingstone 2007: 99, 102). It seems highly unlikely that he would have spent the preceding years, when his brother Sin-nadin-apli and not yet Assurbanipal was destined for kingship, as nothing more than an idle back-up, developing neither his mind nor his body. To limit education to designated crown princes would have made little

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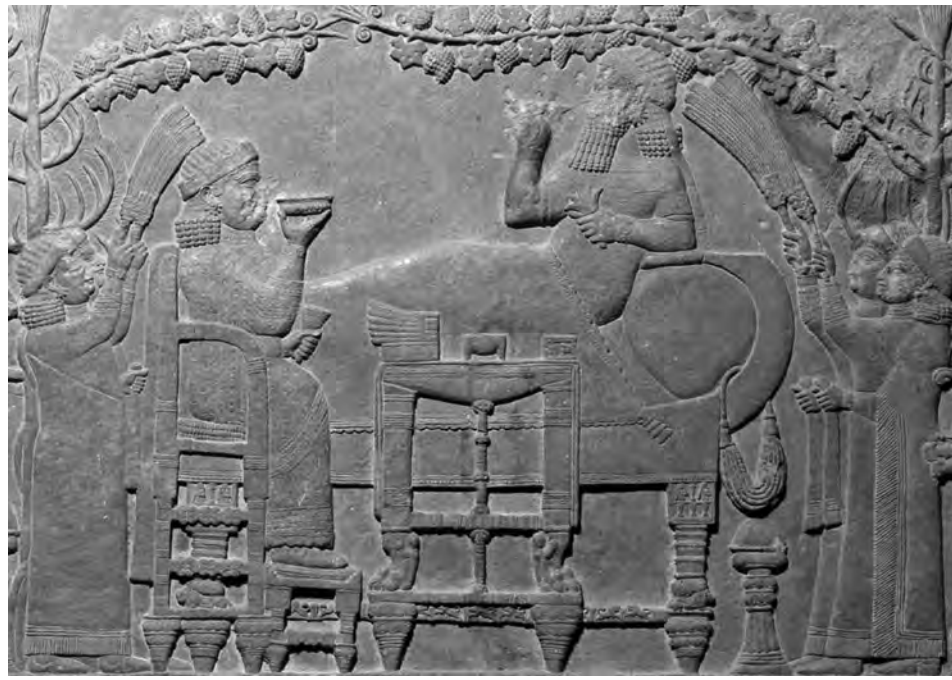

FIGURE 15.2 Assurbanipal with his wife, Libbali-šarrat: detail from the so-called 'Garden Party relief' from Assurbanipal's North Palace in Nineveh. (BM 124920). (Photo © Trustees of the British Museum, from the British Museum's website (http://tinyurl.com/3w4xh73).

practical sense: crown princes sometimes had to be replaced, and selecting a replacement who had already received some education would have presented an obvious advantage. Finally, it has been argued that the benefits of education transcended practical instruction, and that schooling acted as an 'ideological molder of minds' for future members of the bureaucracy (Michalowski 1991: 52 on the basis of the curriculum of the Old Babylonian period; see also Tinney in this volume). The education of members of the Assyrian royal family may have had a similar ideological purpose: to instruct the future king but also his relatives in their roles and their rightful places within the cosmic order.

The royal warrior and scholar: Assurbanipal's lion hunt

The royal lion hunt, as a test and demonstration of the ruler's fitness for kingship, is a prominent theme throughout Mesopotamian history, with the earliest depictions dating to the fourth millennium BC (Reade 1998: 72). By hunting wild lions, the king fulfilled his role of the protective shepherd practically and ritually, ridding the people and

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animals under his control of menacing lions who were wont to 'dev[our in the cattle-pen(s) and] sheepfold(s)' and even to attack the king himself (Weissert 1997: 342–343), threatening the divine order. In an Assyrian cultural context, the hunt may in addition have symbolized a re-enactment of Aššur and Ištar's subjugation of the mythical hosts of chaos, with the king and the lions symbolizing their human counterparts (Weissert 1997: 349); lion hunts—carefully organized spectacles featuring captive but nevertheless deadly beasts and dozens of hunting assistants before the eyes of crowds of spectators looking on from behind protective fences—were performed as part of the cult for these deities (e.g. Livingstone 1989: no. 17). The fact that the Assyrian royal seal depicted the king engaging a rampant lion reflects the importance of this topos for royal ideology (Weissert 1997: 339; Radner 2008: 487–490).

A particularly fine example of Assyrian reliefs showing the king battling lions is represented by the collection from Assurbanipal's North Palace in Nineveh, now on display in the British Museum. Most scenes featuring the actual lion hunt involve a figure who is clearly the Assyrian king, identifiable by his distinctive hat—a truncated cone encircled by a diadem with two bands hanging down behind and with a smaller cone on top—as well as his typical short-sleeved ankle-length tunic (Reade 1998: 21). In some reliefs, however, the protagonist wears the diadem without the royal hat (see Figure 15.3). This simpler form of headdress was typically worn by the crown prince, although Assurbanipal is sometimes shown wearing only the diadem in circumstances which leave little doubt that he is being depicted as king rather than crown prince (Curtis and Reade 1995: 50–51; the so-called 'Garden Party relief', shown in Figure 15.2, is the best example). This makes it difficult to identify the protagonist in the lion hunt reliefs with certainty.

It is conceivable that reliefs depicting a diadem-wearing Assurbanipal may be showing him as crown prince, despite the fact that they have been dated to the latter part of his reign (Curtis and Reade 1995: 87). Perhaps Assurbanipal used some reliefs to look back to his activities as crown prince in the same way that he does in his inscriptions; the Rassam Prism, for instance, was written *c.* 645 BC (eponym Šamaš-da" inanni), yet reminisces about events at least twenty years in the past. The fact that Assurbanipal the hunter is shown in both traditional royal garb and the simpler form of attire supports this interpretation. There is evidence that Assurbanipal engaged in lion hunts around 666 BC (Weissert 1997: 340) and it seems plausible that the crown prince would have received some training in the art of the lion hunt, given its ideological significance.

In our context, the hunting reliefs are also of interest for another reason. Depictions of Assurbanipal as seen from his right profile frequently show a writing stylus tucked under his belt, together with a short sword worn on his left hip (see Figure 15.3). This particular type of stylus, with a groove running down the middle, was used with wax-covered writing tablets, a convenient means of recording information (Seidl 2007: 119, 124; see also the reliefs in Reade 1998: 76–79). The visual combination of weapons and a pen is striking: amidst the inescapable physicality of the hunt, the stylus served to emphasize Assurbanipal's intellectual qualities and achievements. Assurbanipal appears to have been eager to emphasize his personal relationship with the scribal arts, even and especially in the context of the lion hunt. Indeed, the performance of

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FIGURE 15.3 Assurbanipal, dressed in the garb of a crown prince and with a stylus tucked into his belt, slaying a lion: detail from a wall panel relief from Room S of Assurbanipal's North Palace in Nineveh (BM 124874). (Photo © Trustees of the British Museum, from the British Museum's website (http://tinyurl.com/403jz31).

this ritual combines the need for physical fitness and dedicated training on chariot and horseback, with the bow and the sword, with the necessity of understanding the intricate mythological and ideological underpinnings which demand the king's active role in maintaining the cosmic order (Maul 1999). The specific way in which the king is depicted in the lion hunt, dressed as a crown prince and equipped with the stylus and the sword, allows Assurbanipal to remind the viewers—of the actual spectacle as well as of the reliefs—of the wide range of qualities and skills necessary to fulfil the role of king: a royal education, after all, demanded no less than training as a warrior and a scholar.

Conclusions

While it remains difficult to draw general conclusions about the education of princes, given the limited sources available, the evidence provided by the Sargonid rulers and their family members does suggest certain themes. Firstly, the royal ideology of the

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perfect king together with the importance of the military as a means to political power made physical prowess and military leadership a central part of the crown prince's training. Our modern preoccupation with kings' intellectual accomplishments was not shared by their subjects, as illustrated by Assurbanipal's coronation hymn, which refers to the king and his weapons three times but makes no mention of his learnedness (Livingstone 1989: no. 11; cf. Kuhrt 1995: 508).

Secondly, mastery of the scribal arts was worthy of praise but was of secondary importance compared to the king's role as warrior, and was employed to further the interests of the crown. For example, Assurbanipal's motivation in creating his library included the desire to gather together 'whatever is good for the kingship' and 'whatever is good for the palace' (Fincke 2003–04: 123). In the wrong hands, such knowledge was potentially harmful to the monarch and thus had to be closely controlled, with access restricted to the ruling élite and the scholars who served them.

It is possible to trace, tentatively, an evolution in the education of future rulers as a response to the changing nature of kingship, as the Sargonid period witnessed a spread of focus beyond the traditional sphere of military prowess to technical expertise and general knowledge, perhaps as a direct consequence of the expansion of the Assyrian empire. It has been suggested that the depiction of the king as the paragon of wisdom and knowledge may have softened the fierceness of the subjugating warrior-king and made him a more acceptable overlord to the conquered peoples (Fales and Lanfranchi 1997, 111–112). In addition, while princely training took place within a traditional context which dictated its principal components, the personality of the king and the crown prince could mould the training to a certain extent. For example, the great emphasis on scholarly disciplines such as divination at the court of Esarhaddon—a consequence perhaps of Esarhaddon's personal interests or his preoccupation with magic and ritual as a means of curing his chronic poor health—probably influenced the education received by Assurbanipal. Despite the royal rhetoric of predestination for kingship, princes relied on others for their instruction, and it is only natural that the personality of their teachers, royal or otherwise, left an impression on them.

Further reading

Critical editions of Neo-Assyrian texts, with English translations, are published in the State Archives of Assyria series (18 volumes, 1987–); the correspondence of the scholars and their royal masters is published in Parpola (1993). Melville (2006) provides an accessible selection of official inscriptions relating to the Sargonid rulers. For a detailed discussion of Assurbanipal's famous library, including its historical and intellectual background and a brief look at Assurbanipal's training, see Fincke (2003–04). Weissert (1997) examines the topos of the royal lion hunt in its ideological context, while Reade (1998) offers a richly illustrated overview of Assyrian monumental art. The specific topic of the education received by Assurbanipal and other members of the royal family is discussed in Villard (1997, in French) and in Livingstone (2007).

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PART IV

DECISIONS

In the cuneiform sources, the subject of decision-making is most visible in judicial records documenting the binding resolution of conflicts. As Sophie Démare-Lafont stresses in Chapter 16, in addition to court procedure, arbitration was the principal strategy employed to resolve legal argument. At court, judgment was normally passed by a board of judges who decided the case jointly, providing early evidence for decision-making in committees, a subject that enjoys much attention in economics and political science (e.g. Facione and Facione 2007; Levy 2007).

Joint decision-making is also a key topic in Chapter 17, where Karen Radner surveys the impact of advice received from two principal sets of counsellors—the highest state officials and the scholarly experts—on the decisions made by the king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Andreas Fuchs, in Chapter 18, deals with the same period and milieu when portraying Assyria at war. In war and peace, a crucial role in the decision-making process was played by divination, for which Dominique Charpin provides another case study from 18th-century Mari in Chapter 12. The principles are studied in more detail by Ulla Koch and Francesca Rochberg in Chapters 21 and 29. Reliance on messages and signals from the gods to provide guidance in decision-making was not exclusive to Mesopotamia, as highlighted by recent scholarship on ancient Greece, Rome, and China (e.g. Athens: Bowden 2005; Sparta: Powell 2009; Republican Rome: Rasmussen 2003; Han China: Loewe 1994). This valuable tool in facilitating non-hierarchical discourse is, of course, still in use in many parts of the world today (e.g. Kim 2005 on South Korea).

Medical decision-making is just emerging as a topic in research on ancient healing (e.g. Sanchez and Burridge 2007) after commanding much attention in the recent literature on psychology and medicine. There, the concern with decision-making, its mechanisms and their impact, reflects in part the great changes affecting the authority and autonomy of the 'gods in white' since the 1960s: no longer is the medical practitioner 'alone with his patient and God' (Jonas 1969: 238) but decision-making is now heavily

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regulated and monitored by outsiders, including legislators, lawyers, and the media (Rothman 2003). Anne Löhnert and Daniel Schwemer discuss the approaches and strategies of two Mesopotamian therapeutic professions, the 'lamentation expert' (*kalû*) in Chapter 19 and the 'exorcist' (*āšipu*) in Chapter 20. These practitioners made decisions in regard to their remedial or preventative strategies largely at their own discretion, although heavily controlled by the constraints of tradition. Barbara Böck's discussion of cuneiform literature on pharmacology in Chapter 32 enhances this picture, while in Chapter 13 Michel Tanret provides a biographical sketch of one such expert, the lamenter Ur-Utu. The king's association and interaction with men of learning is Eckart Frahm's subject in Chapter 24.

Further reading

Westbrook (2005) provides a concise introduction to the powers and duties of judges. Oppenheim (1975) is the classic text on the impact of 'intellectuals' on Mesopotamian policy and decision-making. Jacobsen (1943) was the first to advocate the idea that there is a strong Mesopotamian tradition of collective decision-making, and his concept of 'primitive democracy' has become part of the terminology used in political science (cf. Robinson 1997; Isakhan 2007). Critics have rightly stressed that Jacobsen argued primarily on the basis of literary evidence regarding the assembly of the gods (e.g. Bailkey 1967) but there can be little doubt that collective governance was practised in the ancient Near East (e.g. Fleming 2004 on Old Babylonian Mari; Barjamovic 2004 on the Neo-Babylonian city-states of the first millennium BC).

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CHAPTER 16

JUDICIAL DECISION-MAKING: JUDGES AND ARBITRATORS

SOPHIE DÉMARE-LAFONT

The Mesopotamian perception of justice combined the notions of stability (*kittum*, derived from *kânum* 'to be stable, solid') and straightness (*mīšarum*, from *ešērum* 'to be right, straight') and was intended to reproduce cosmic order in the terrestrial world. At the core of this was the idea that justice was a divine quality: according to an Old Babylonian hymn to the goddess Nungal, 'she keeps her eyes on judgments and decisions, she knows true from false. For her, they throw over the land her casting net of cleverly woven mesh: the evildoer who does not follow her path does not escape its reach' (Civil 1993: 73; ETCSL 4. 28. 1). In Mesopotamia, it was most prominently Šamaš, the sun-god, who brought light, fought evil and iniquity, and restored order (*muštēširum*, another noun from *ešērum*). As his human counterparts, the king, and in turn the judges, were responsible for 'restoring the law' (*šutēšurum*), which was conceived as a trial whose sentence brought order to the human world and restored the harmony of the universe that evil had destroyed. Legislative activity, therefore, was secondary in Mesopotamian legal culture: establishing official norms was far less important than correcting injustices. Indeed, Hammurabi king of Babylon (r. 1792–1750 BC) describes his laws, recorded on the famous stele decorated with an image of Šamaš presenting the divine insignia to the king (Figure 16.1), as 'fair judgments' (*dīnāt mīšarim*; Roth 1997: 133).

Judgment was thus a transposition of divine practices into the human sphere. The gods judged humans as in a tribunal, and particularly at the moment of their death when the dead entered the netherworld. This was thought to be structured like earthly society, with rules and judges, the most prominent of whom was Šamaš, the sun-god and god of justice, from the second millennium BC onwards. An incantation to this god emphasizes that the individual 'whose judgment has not been passed, whose case has not been decided, is a spirit frightening men in dreams, turning the living man into the ghost of a dead man' (Alster 1991–93: 75), making it clear that the gods judged the dead in order to let the living live in peace.

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FIGURE 16.1 The top part of a stone stela inscribed with the Laws of Hammurabi of Babylon, the so-called Codex Hammurabi (Louvre, Sb 8), showing the king in front of the seated god of justice, Šamaš, receiving the insignia of just kingship, a measuring rod and a measuring tape. (Photo by Karen Radner).

In this chapter, we will first discuss the various people whom we find acting as judges and arbitrators, before discussing the individual stages and elements of a trial at court. The central goal of this contribution is to highlight that despite its apparent adversarial nature, Mesopotamian judicial practice was in essence conciliatory.

Judges and arbitrators

Various groups of people were responsible for the dispensation of justice (Westbrook 2005: 29–31). While the king was naturally the judge of his subjects, most local officials also had judicial powers as part of their administrative functions; household heads traditionally exercised jurisdiction over their domestic dependants; local assemblies rendered verdicts, as did private judges (arbitrators). There were also professional judges (Sumerian di-ku$_5$, Akkadian *dayyānum*) but they are sometimes difficult to identify: it

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often happened that a person rendered a decision without his title being recorded, while in other cases, the seal impressed on the clay tablet documenting the verdict indicates another professional title. For instance, in a slave sale contract from Ur, written at the end of the third millennium BC, it is stated that 'the seal of Lu-Enlilla the judge was rolled', but the seal legend itself reads: 'Lu-Enlilla, the shipping agent' (Steinkeller 1989: 302–303).

Justice could therefore be exercised by a variety of individuals, yet the right to judge did not necessarily include the right to punish, which was reserved for the jurisdiction of legal courts. We should stress that there were no religious courts: while temples could become involved in a judicial procedure because of the nature of the offence (e.g. in the case of temple theft, the deity would determine the penalty and communicate it by oracle, see Roth 1997: 155: Middle Assyrian Laws, tablet A §1), because the judges demanded supra-rational evidence (an oath or ordeal, see below), or because the investigation was conducted by a joint commission (lay and clergy), the sentence would nevertheless be pronounced by the secular authority (Westbrook 2003d: 368).

Domestic jurisdiction: the head of household

Family heads had jurisdiction over the members of their household. This was not the result of a father's property rights over his dependants, but a power relationship created by blood ties and, more broadly, by communal life, encompassing such diverse relationships as those between parent and child, adoptive parent and adopted child, husband and wife, master and servant, or principal and apprentice.

The power of fathers and husbands is mentioned in law collections and in clauses of adoption contracts (while the power of mothers and wives is rarely described in the sources). The Middle Assyrian Laws of the later second millennium BC describe the punishments that a husband could lawfully impose on his wife (Roth 1997: 175–176: tablet A §§57–59), which mirrors the creditor's right to punish a pledge put in his charge (Roth 1997: 170: tablet A §44). The husband could beat his wife, pull her hair, damage her ears, and, in cases of theft or adultery, he could also cut off her ears or nose (Roth 1997: 158: tablet A §§4–5, 15). Roughly contemporary legal documents from Nuzi show that a father could put his disobedient son in irons, incarcerate or muzzle him, and reduce him to servitude (Zaccagnini 2003: 594). In Babylonia and Assyria, the punishment most often meted out to a rebellious son, after he had been disinherited, was slavery.

However, there was a general trend to reduce the powers of household heads through government control. Thus the Laws of Hammurabi do not authorize the father to disinherit his son until after the second instance of misconduct proven by a court (Roth 1997: 113: §§168–169) and the Middle Assyrian Laws seek to regulate the use of private justice in cases of adultery (S. Lafont 1999: 69–72). In both law collections, emphasis is also placed on absolution, whether imposed or voluntary, corollary to the right to punish. This alternative became the exclusive privilege of the king.

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Royal jurisdiction: the king

The 'just king' is a recurring theme in the royal inscriptions from the third millennium BC onwards. To be just was amongst the foremost duties of the king, the 'shepherd' (Sumerian sipa; Akkadian *rē'ûm*) of his subjects. Kings present themselves as 'the shepherd who loves justice', charged with 'letting the god Enlil's subjects graze in righteousness and justice' (Seux 1980–83: 162–163). It was Irikagina, king of Lagaš around 2350 BC, who first developed the concept in his so-called Reform Texts, around three pillars of justice which became the basis of Mesopotamian royal ideology: remission of debts, protection of widows and orphans against the powerful, and restoration of fiscal and administrative public order. To quote the Reform Texts' conclusion: 'He cleared and cancelled obligations for those indentured families, citizens of Lagaš living as debtors because of grain taxes, barley payments, theft or murder. Irikagina solemnly promised (the god) Ningirsu that he would never subjugate the waif and the widow to the powerful' (Cooper 1986: 73). Many other royal inscriptions, the prologues and epilogues of law codes, as well as letters emphasize the royal duty of defending the weak and oppressed.

The trope of the 'king of justice' is particularly well illustrated in an Old Babylonian letter from Mari relating a prophecy of the storm-god of Aleppo for Zimri-Lim, king of Mari (r. 1775–1762 BC). Taking up the literary motif of that deity's primordial battle against the sea (Bordreuil and Pardee 1993), the storm-god says that, having himself fought against chaos, he entrusts kingship to Zimri-Lim, presenting him with weapons in order to overcome disorder and restore justice:

> I have put you back on the throne of your father and given you the weapons with which I fought against the (primordial) Sea. (…) Listen to this single word from me: when someone who has a legal case, appeals to you, saying: 'Someone has wronged me', stand up and make your decision; answer him righteously. That is all I want of you. (Durand 1993: 45)

But this was not merely rhetoric: the king indeed was his subjects' judge and had to be accessible to all, at least in the early second millennium BC. This was a duty imposed on the king by the gods, as the storm-god reminds him: 'When a complainant, male or female, appeals to you, hold audience and give them justice. That is all I ask from you' (B. Lafont 1984: 11). When Hammurabi, king of Babylon, proclaimed himself 'king of righteousness' (Roth 1997: 135: Laws of Hammurabi, xlviii 95: *šar mīšarim*), he fulfilled his duty towards the sun-god Šamaš, just as the storm-god of Aleppo had commanded Zimri-Lim of Mari to answer 'righteously' (*išariš*).

Some literary works also illustrate royal intervention in judicial matters. Thus, a Sumerian fable tells of three thirsty drovers, each forsaking his ox, cow, and cart to go and find water; when a calf is born during their absence it is claimed by all three men, who then take their case to the king to be judged (Alster 1991–93). A literary composition from the time of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon (r. 604–562 BC), extolling the qualities of this king, recounts in detail a river ordeal imposed by Nebuchadnezzar that resulted in a bizarre outcome (Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003: 925). One man, probably the accuser, plunges into the river and disappears. The angry king sends his soldiers in

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search of the body, which is found on the riverbank a few days later, seemingly having been burned by fire.

In addition to approaching the king directly, commoners could involve the king in a law case by sending him a written complaint alleging abuse of his administration. Thus a resident of Sippar, near Babylon, complained anonymously to Hammurabi's successor Samsu-iluna (r. 1749–1712 BC) of a procedural flaw in the implementation of an edict for the restoration of justice (*mīšarum*): 'Let my lord render a verdict in the case where they broke tablets in the absence of judges and the interested party! May all of Sippar see that the weak may not be abused by the strong in front of my lord' (Charpin 2000: no. 47). In a similar vein but even more emphatically, a Babylonian official complained of oppression and injustice to his overlord Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (r. 680–669 BC):

> I came and invoked the right to appeal to the king about (the official) Arrabu, saying, 'I have a matter relevant to the palace.' He did not fear (the king) but took away my property, (and) having arrested me, put me in custody. And now, when before all the people I have come and grasped the feet of the king, my lord, this very day I am humiliating myself unto death. The multitudes who are dead are at peace! Since last year nobody gives me food to eat. Hunger and thirst have befallen me. I go and drink water from a well; I wash my feet (there); and I go up to keep the watch of the king, my lord. (Reynolds 2003: no. 181)

According to the judicial tradition of northern Mesopotamia, the litigating parties could request the king's intervention at any time during a trial. Hence, in the Old Assyrian period at the beginning of the second millennium BC, it was enough to say: 'Bring my case to the city (of Assur) and the prince (i.e. the ruler of Assur)' (Veenhof 2003b: 439). At Nuzi in the 14th century BC, anyone who considered his trial before ordinary judges to have been badly conducted could present his case to the king (Zaccagnini 2003: 570). In the Neo-Assyrian period, the 'king's word' (*abat šarri*) overruled any earlier decision (Radner 2003: 887).

Because the king ruled by divine grace, he was the supreme judge but at the same time considered to be fundamentally different from ordinary judges: royal titulary never mentions the term 'judge' (Sumerian di-ku$_5$; Akkadian *dayyānum*). The key difference is that the king's judgments were thought to be divinely inspired, as one Assyrian scholar argued when he likened his lord to 'the perfect likeness of the god' (Parpola 1993: no. 207).

Thanks to the divine origin of his authority, the king had the right to pardon anyone sentenced to death. This royal prerogative is made explicit in the Hittite Laws in cases of bestiality and adultery: before his execution, the offender is to be presented to the king, who can confirm the death penalty or let him live (Hoffner 1997: 148–149: §187, §189). The royal pardon 'resurrects life' (*bulluṭum*) for those who should have died under sentence. But with the formula *imât ul iballuṭ* 'he shall die, he will not live' (the first clause referring to the death penalty, the second to the refusal of pardon), the courts of the Old Babylonian period intended to exclude possible pardons in the most serious criminal cases (Westbrook 1998).

In general all capital crimes, in the sense of offences that could lead to punishment by death, had to be tried by the king while ordinary judges examined all other

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misdemeanours, punishable by a fine (e.g. Roth 1997: 66: Laws of Ešnunna §48). This royal monopoly is also explicitly expressed in texts from Old Babylonian Mari, such as in the case of a man who after blinding his fugitive slave asked his sheikh (*merhûm*) to impale the slave. The sheikh refuses to do so on the grounds that only the king could make that decision (S. Lafont 1997a): no one, whether senior official or private individual, had the authority to condemn anyone, even a slave, to death. Therefore, the punishment of certain crimes was inherently the sole responsibility of the sovereign: this category also included political crimes such as conspiracy, treason, incitement to rebellion—which are documented mostly for the Neo-Babylonian period (Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003: 965)—and disputes concerning crown land (Leemans 1957).

In practice, however, the king often delegated his role as judge in capital cases to the local assembly (see below) or to members of the royal court (see Jas 1996: no. 42 for an example from 7th-century Assyria). It appears that the Mesopotamian king judged few trials himself and that in first-millennium Assyria, appeals to his jurisdiction became increasingly more unusual (Postgate 1974). Already for early second-millennium Babylonia, it can be demonstrated that the king mostly left it to local officials to settle disputes (Leemans 1957).

While the ruler's role as the 'just king' was clearly well established in people's minds, as evidenced by personal names such as Lugal-di-ku$_5$ 'The king is judge' (Falkenstein 1956: 25), individual kings did not always prove themselves to be paragons of justice. 18th-century Mari provides a good example of a king who abused his supreme judicial authority in the name of what we would today call reasons of state. After two merchants from a kingdom in the Upper Euphrates region had been robbed on their journey to the city of Saggaratum in the kingdom of Mari, the local governor had the crime investigated. But no progress was made, giving rise to the fear that latent tribal conflicts might erupt. To prevent this, the king of Mari first proposed to sell the merchants as slaves to a far-away country, but eventually it was decided to throw them into solitary confinement, having cut out their tongues and put out their eyes (Durand 2002: nos. 928–929).

Communal courts: the city assembly, the elders, and the 'quay'

The citizens' assembly of a city, attested especially well for the Old Babylonian period, could judge both civil and criminal cases. The assembly (*puhrum*) acted independently in matters concerning the property of temples and the status of individuals, for instance to establish paternity posthumously (Roth 2001) or freedom from slavery. In criminal cases, the king had to delegate his judicial authority to the assembly, whose sentences were then attributed to the sovereign. The verdict of a trial from Nippur, which survives only as a school exercise text, ends with words 'trial of the king' (di-dab$_5$-ba lugal-la-kam) (Greengus 1969–70; Roth 1983: 282). The assembly could carry out procedural acts, such as convening the judges in order to stop an injustice, or testifying against a judge in a trial instigated by his peers concerning a false accusation (Soldt 1990: no. 115). It

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was also convened to witness or participate in the execution of a sentence. Hence a judge who committed an abuse was to be removed from his office 'in the assembly' (Roth 1997: 82: Laws of Hammurabi §5), which was perhaps a form of public humiliation. Similarly, a man who slapped his superior was to be beaten 'in the assembly' (Roth 1997: 121: Laws of Hammurabi §202), suggesting that the sixty blows' penalty was meted out by the assembly members.

Another local court was that of the elders, known from the third millennium onwards (Catagnoti 2003: 230) and attested throughout Mesopotamian history. Such longevity was probably due to its wide-ranging powers, not only in judicial matters, but also in administration and politics. The term 'elders' (Sumerian ab-ba; Akkadian *šībūtu*), which is always attested in the plural, designates distinguished but not necessarily older notables who are frequently attested passing judgment in land and inheritance disputes, but also in cases of runaway or stolen slaves (Reviv 1989: 171–176; Greengus 1986: 171–172). As the custodians of local judicial traditions, they were consulted especially in disputes regarding property claimed by a municipality. A dispute from Old Babylonian Larsa concerns a garden which was claimed by the municipal authorities of Bulum five years after it had been acquired by a private individual: the judges of Larsa recommended that, should the case be too difficult for them, the local elders should forward it to Larsa (Frankena 1974: no. 142).

Yet another collegial body, the 'quay' (*kārum*), is attested in a judicial function, especially in the Old Assyrian period (Larsen 1976: 255–282). Its jurisdiction encompassed all Assyrian citizens who had settled in the trading colonies established in Central Anatolia. Every colony, the most important being in Kaneš (modern Kültepe), had its own quay. The quays were mainly concerned with commercial disputes, but also civil cases such as divorces and inheritance disputes, while serious criminal cases had to be judged in the capital city, Assur.

Administrative officials

Many senior officials were responsible for dispensing justice, as part of their administrative duties and of course in their role as royal representatives. In the kingdom of the Third Dynasty of Ur, the king delegated his judicial powers to both civil and military governors (B. Lafont and Westbrook 2003: 193). In the early second millennium BC, dignitaries stationed in the provinces are also well attested as judges. Their correspondence with king Hammurabi of Babylon shows the extent of their responsibilities. For instance, Sin-iddinam, royal secretary and later governor of the province of Larsa, acted as judge in trials about land tenure, commercial disputes, corruption, theft, and even the disappearance of a child (Westbrook 2003d: 367). While the usual term *dayyānum* 'judge' was no longer used for human judges in the Neo-Assyrian period, various high officials are attested in judicial roles (Radner 2003: 890). The same types of personnel were also active in Neo-Babylonian law cases (Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003: 919).

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Professional judges

As we have seen, it is not always easy to identify those who exercised judicial authority, because they did not necessarily carry the title of 'judge'. But there are professionals and they are habitually designated as 'judge' (Sumerian di-ku$_5$; Akkadian *dayyānum*), similar to the usage of modern titles such as Doctor of Laws or LLD. In mixed tribunals which also included various relevant notables such as municipal officers or community leaders the professional judges are identified by their title, in addition to their patronym.

In the Old Babylonian period, the title of 'royal judge' (di-ku$_5$ lugal) was held by those judges who exercised justice on behalf and by proxy of the sovereign, as shown, for instance, by the expression 'royal judges of the cities of Larsa and Ur' in a text from Larsa from the reign of Rim-Sin (r. 1822–1763 BC) (Charpin 1980: 217). Royal judges are also attested in the Neo-Babylonian period (Wunsch 2000).

To an extent, basic legal training was included in general scribal training, along with other disciplines such as mathematics and literature, according to school exercise tablets from Old Babylonian Nippur (Civil 1985). Law was taught in the elementary phase of scribal education, by two successive and complementary methods (Démare-Lafont 2010). The first was to learn by heart a series of words and phrases, in increasing order of complexity. The series *Ana Ittišu*, compiled in the first millennium from material already attested since the early second millennium, illustrates this process: tablet VII of this series contained the formulae of legal contracts which were memorized by keyword, then inserted into more and more elaborate phrases, in both Sumerian and Akkadian. For example: 'wifehood, in wifehood, he took in wifehood, he takes in wifehood, he has taken her in wifehood' (Landsberger 1937: 96). The students were also familiarized with the law collections by remembering short extracts on classical themes, such as the case of a man who mistreats a rented ox: 'If he (i.e. the renter) destroys the eye of the ox he shall weigh and deliver one-half of its value (in silver). If he (i.e. the renter) cuts off the horn of the ox he shall weigh and deliver one-third of its value (in silver)' (Roth 1997: 40: §§1–2). By copying these texts, students became familiar with the style of legal documentation and also memorized legal remedies. In this paradigmatic approach, form and substance were closely linked. The second method was based on copying the full text of a trial or lengthy extracts from the law codes, providing the student with complete models that enabled him to perfect his legal language and understanding (for the late first millennium BC see Clancier in this volume). From Old Babylonian Nippur, the 'city of judges' (*āl dayyānī*), a dozen of these judicial tablets are known, representing major cases of civil and criminal jurisprudence (Lieberman 1992). But while we know about legal training in the context of general scribal education we have no evidence that would allow us to reconstruct later stages of a future judge's training. Professional judges were legal technicians who were able to draft contracts and settle legal cases on the basis of objective knowledge, not only their reputations. However, in Mesopotamian literature, the topic of their moral qualities rather than their professional expertise is explored. Hence, a hymn to the sun-god Šamaš,

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god of justice and divine chief judge, dating to the Middle Babylonian period, juxtaposes the ideal judge with the bad judge: the god punishes the corrupt and unscrupulous judge and prolongs the life of the judge who protects the weak and refuses gifts (Lambert 1960: 133). The 'gift' (*kadrû* or *ṭātu*), legitimate when offered to deities or the king, was considered a bribe for the judge (Lambert 1965: 6, iii 14). While it may be possible to understand the 'gift' as a kind of remuneration, it is the excessive acceptance of rewards that is condemned here, and its possible impact on the judge's impartiality. The opposition of corruption, a source of injustice, with honesty, a guarantee of fairness, is also attested in other literary compositions, such as the praise of Nebuchadnezzar II already mentioned. Here, the corrupt judge loses his career because the king withholds support: 'And if the judge took a bribe or a present, he (i.e. the king) would pay no attention to him' (Lambert 1965: 5, 8).

As the judge had power to interpret the law (see below), the combination of moral virtue and legal competence was crucial. Old Babylonian letters illustrate that his peers could punish a judge if he was thought to have passed a wrong sentence (Soldt 1990: no. 2), and according to the law collection of Hammurabi of Babylon, a judge was to be removed from office if he was proven to have changed his verdict once delivered. The law is not penalizing forgery here—that is, an alteration of the tablet with the verdict as documenting the outcome of the trial—but wilful disregard for the principle that the final decision is binding (Roth 1997: 82: Laws of Hammurabi §5): If a party attempted to obtain a re-hearing of the same law case the judge had to render a sentence identical to the previous one—this was considered the only way to guarantee good administration of justice. If the judge violated this principle the law assumed that he was acting out of personal interest: he was penalized with a heavy fine and lost his position as a judge.

Arbitrators

To judge by the relatively small number of legal documents recording court trials over the three millennia of cuneiform legal history, the ancient Mesopotamians were not particularly litigious. A partial explanation lies in the frequent recourse to arbitration, a preventative process that was meant to avoid going to court. It has been suggested that arbitration, which is widely attested in judicial procedure from the Old Babylonian period onwards, was originally an institution of the nomadic Amorites. In contrast to the urban, centralized culture of southern Mesopotamia with its court trials, the Amorites' mobility, the argument goes, required a simple and flexible instrument of private justice (Dombradi 1996: §§504–506). The judicial documentation of the Ur III period has been used to strengthen this position. But these are state records of verdicts and therefore reflect an aspect of judicial practice from which arbitration is logically absent. This opposition between two legal cultures in the third millennium may therefore be artificial and arbitration may have coexisted with court trials long before the Old Babylonian period.

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Arbitrators were private individuals chosen by the legal parties to pass judgment in their case, whose sentences were accepted by all to have the same value as a verdict in court. This function was not designated by any specific term: community leaders, administrative officers, and colleagues who were asked to negotiate a compromise between the parties, all appear in the legal documentation as witnesses (*šībūtu*).

Arbitration is especially well documented in the world of the merchants, particularly in the Old Assyrian period (Veenhof 1991; 2003b). The traders had their disputes judged by their peers who were familiar with the legal and financial aspects of the cases and also sensitive to the constraints of time and money on mercantile activities. As such, they enjoyed the confidence of their colleagues, a prerequisite for the implementation of their decisions. Merchants clearly considered arbitration to be the fastest and most effective way to resolve disputes, mostly of a financial nature, between them. The procedure required the creditor to have the debtor agree to a deadline for repayment in front of witnesses, who were chosen from among the parties' peers. In order to settle the dispute their role could evolve into that of arbitrators, appointed and respected by both opponents. The judgment was normally given orally but could be written down as a certified protocol (*ṭuppum harmum*), sealed by the arbitrators and the party who had accepted an obligation resulting from the procedure. From a technical point of view, as their verdicts were recorded in the format of witness statements it would seem that the arbitrators limited themselves to a questioning role, reacting to the developments of the dispute unfolding in front of them and eventually proposing a compromise. But, while the document was drawn up as a witness statement, this cannot disguise that in reality it was a verdict, albeit one susceptible to appeal in the higher jurisdiction of the quay (*kārum*, see above). Two-thirds of the attested cases of Old Assyrian arbitration ended up before the quay, but this is not necessarily an indication that the procedure was inefficient: it is more likely that this was because the quay's intervention necessitated the written documentation of that first arbitration, essentially an oral procedure, (Veenhof 1991: 456).

Outside the commercial world, witnesses in inheritance divisions had a mediating function: in case of disputes between the heirs, they could intervene and negotiate mutually satisfactory arrangements to all parties involved (e.g. for the Middle Assyrian period, Démare-Lafont 2005: 79). Arbitrators chosen privately by the conflicting parties are attested in a property dispute from early in the reign of Samsu-iluna of Babylon (r. 1749–1712 BC), about the encroachment of a house onto the neighbouring property. The accused party assembled the 'men of the neighbourhood who know them (either the parties or the properties)' (LÚ.MEŠ DUMU.MEŠ *ba-ab-tim mu-dé-e-šu-nu*), probably long-term neighbours who could remember the original size of the two properties. As their survey was favourable to the plaintiff, they encouraged the defendant to acknowledge his opponent's claim and to pay compensation (Démare-Lafont 2005: 76–77). But most importantly, judges habitually acted as arbitrators during the trial, encouraging parties to find a compromise before the final settlement of the case was imposed (see below).

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Trials at court

Trials took place at the city gate or at the quay (*kārum*): they were held in public. There was no procedural distinction between civil and criminal cases, which were considered on the basis of the same types of evidence and often by the same judges. Procedure was adversarial in principle, pitching the parties' testimonies against each other, but also included inquisitorial elements: the judges played an active role in questioning the parties, examining their testimonies, finding and gathering evidence, and investigating the circumstances of the case. This inquisitorial aspect became more and more important. By the Neo-Babylonian period, evidence was privileged at the expense of the increasingly rare ordeal, which had previously been the trump card in any court case (see below).

While most court cases were initiated by one party charging another with an offence, some cases came before the judges without a formal charge against another party primarily in matters of personal status and family obligations. Examples include the posthumous establishment of paternity (Roth 2001), a widow with children obtaining official permission to remarry (Roth 1997: 116: Laws of Hammurabi §177), and the wife of an absent husband obtaining maintenance provisions from the state (Roth 1997: 170–171: Middle Assyrian Laws, tablet A §45).

Before we discuss the individual stages and elements of a Mesopotamian trial, the example of an Old Babylonian judicial document from Sippar will provide us with a typical example of a judicial procedure as recorded in a verdict, giving the parties' initial statements, establishing of evidence (and the lack of it), relating the taking of the oath, recording the 'non-claiming' clause, and finally providing the names of judges and date (Veenhof 2003a: 318–319; Charpin 2005; Figure 16.2). The background for the dispute about Ṣurarum's paternity is the question of whether he is required to perform public service duties, as his supposed father did, or not. The board of judges therefore consists of those officials who organize public service work at Sippar.

> Concerning Ṣurarum son of Šimat-Ištar, sister of Lamassani, the temple devotee (*nadītum*) of Šamaš, daughter of Ili-išmeanni: Warad-Kubi, the general of the troops in the Sippar countryside, Qurrudum the captain, Ina-palešu the captain, Ibni-Sin the military scribe and the elders of his clan made the following declaration before Marduk-muballiṭ and Marduk-mušallim, two 'fathers of the troops', Elmešum the treasurer (*šandabakkum*) (and) Ili-iqišam the 'personnel director of the palace gate' in Sippar-Amnanum when they had to organize the work of Sippar:
>
> 'Šumum-libši son of Ana-Šamaš-liṣi, who belonged to the troops under our command, married Šimat-Ištar, sister of Lamassani, daughter of Ili-išmeanni; and Ṣurarum is his son and Abisum his oldest son, whom the Kassite troops took away. She left two sons to Šumum-libši son of Ana-Šamaš-liṣi, who belonged to the troops under our command. But now Lamassani, the temple devotee of Šamaš, daughter of Ili-išmeanni, has taken his son Ṣurarum; and he lives with her.'
>
> When they had stated this, one brought Lamassani, the temple devotee of Šamaš, and her brother Ahi-ayamši, before the gentlemen. The latter interrogated them

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FIGURE 16.2 Old Babylonian judicial document from Sippar, recording the verdict in a paternity dispute (BM 96998). (Photos by Frans van Koppen. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

concerning the mentioned Ṣurarum and they made the following declaration: 'We have not married off our sister Šimat-Ištar. She became a loose woman and Šumum-libši son of Ana-Šamaš-liṣi, like many other men, used to visit her. He neither established a marriage contract for her, nor did he provide her […], nor did we receive the bridal payment for her.'

When they made this declaration they requested from them (i.e. Warad-Kubi and the other plaintiffs) witnesses who had been present when he (i.e. Šumum-libši) bound her by marriage, but they did not bring them. The notables thereupon considered their case and ordered them to go to the Gate of Šamaš, to bind or release in the throw-net (i.e. to take an ordeal). As the notables gave this order one made the divine symbol (*šurinnum*) of Šamaš, 'the Vanguard' of 'The-House-of-the-Judge-of-the-Land', (and) the divine symbol of Šamaš of 'The-House-of-Judgment' take their stand in the Gate of Šamaš of the 'House-of-the-Judgment'.

Warad-Kubi, the general of the troops of the Sippar countryside, the captains Qurrudum and Ina-palešu, Ibni-Sin the military scribe and the elders of his clan

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refused to approach the throw-net. But Lamassani, the temple devotee of Šamaš, declared as follows in the throw-net: 'Abisum and Ṣurarum were not born as sons of Šumum-libši; I am the one who has raised them.' This she declared.

(That) in the future Warad-Kubi the general, the captains Qurrudum and Ina-palešu, Ibni-Sin the military scribe and the elders of his clan will not raise claims for Abisum and Ṣurarum, her sons, against Lamassani, the temple devotee of Šamaš, they have sworn with an oath by Šamaš, Marduk and king Ammi-ditana.

In the presence of Ilušu-abušu the general, of Sin-aham-idinnam the captain, of Marduk-muballiṭ the priest of Nergal, of Etel-pi-Šamaš son of Ikun-pi-Šamaš, of Sini son of Ipiq-Aya, priest of Šamaš of the 'House-of-the-Judge-of-the-Land', of Sin-išmeanni son of Šamaš-nur-barra, priest of Šamaš of the 'House-of-Judgment', (and) of the secretaries Iddin-Bunene (and) Ibbi-Ilabrat. Supervised by Nur-Adad, the herald of the Amorites.

Date (year 29 of the reign of Ammi-ditana of Babylon = 1654 BC).

Opening the trial: summoning the parties

In different periods, different rules applied to the opening of a trial and it is impossible to generalize. If we focus on the Old Babylonian period, plaintiff and defendant would usually summon each other to appear before the judges (Westbrook 2003d: 370); in criminal cases, the plaintiff normally triggered legal action, but there is evidence for the state prosecuting in the case of very serious crimes (Dombradi 1996: §257). It is not clear how the parties chose the judicial court. As we have already stated, subject specialization was unknown and the same judges examined both civil and criminal offences.

The right to sue was open to all, with also women and slaves being admitted to court as parties and in order to testify as witnesses. The parties had to appear in court in person. Failure to do so led to a trial in their absence (Lion 2000: no. 107 for an example from 15th-century Nuzi) or to an automatic loss of the trial and the imposition of a fine (Jas 1996: no. 54 for an example from 7th-century Assyria). Minors were represented by others—for instance, the girl in a witchcraft trial in Old Babylonian Mari whose mother had to undergo the ordeal in her place (Durand 1988: no. 253)—and it seems that non-resident foreigners also required legal representation (Limet 1972). From the beginning of the trial until the final delivery of the verdict, opponents could make an arrangement to end the dispute (see below): the spirit of arbitration pervaded judicial procedure, as the judges habitually tried to have the parties reach an amicable settlement.

An opportunity for conciliation

Certainly in the Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods (Dombradi 1996: §§250, 389; Jas 1996: no. 62) but probably also in other periods, a formal pre-trial stage was meant to provide a forum for reaching a conciliation before the judges were involved. The plaintiff, who had summoned his opponent in front of witnesses in order to force him to fulfil

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his obligations or to pay him compensation, presented his claims, to which the defendant then replied. Ideally, this confrontation would result in a mutually acceptable agreement, usually stipulating a certain sum of money to be paid by a certain time, which was recorded in a written document bearing the names of the witnesses (Dombradi 1996: §250b).

Evidence

Failing conciliation, the parties presented their oral statements to a board which could consist of notables, administrative officers, and/or professional judges and whose role was to examine the evidence. If the board deemed the evidence presented to be insufficient, the case was rejected; otherwise the case was sent to court for trial.

This stage of the trial was critical, especially in criminal cases, because it determined the facts and therefore the degree of the possible punishment. The responsibility of the accused could be deemed reduced due to the circumstances of a crime—for instance, in a case of homicide when the perpetrator was able to demonstrate that he had earlier suffered from the eventual victim's aggression (B. Lafont 2000: no. 31, Ur III period). The accused could also plead guilty at this stage, thereby waiving the right to make his case and accepting the penalty (Jas 1996: no. 32 for an example from 7th-century Assyria).

Cuneiform law accepted both material evidence (such as oral testimony, written documentation, or being caught in the act) and supra-rational evidence (oath and ordeal), which could be used in combination or separately. Witnesses providing testimony were often put under oath, as were litigants who provided written documentation. According to Middle Assyrian law, certain crimes were in need of double evidence, as indicated by the verbs *burru* and *kunnu*, used together in the sense of 'convincing (the other party) by all means, human and divine'. Technically, this indicates a hierarchy between the two types of evidence: only if the material evidence was considered consistent was supra-rational evidence then invoked (Westbrook 2003b).

In civil cases, the general principle was that the plaintiff had to provide proof of his position; in criminal proceedings the burden of proof was reversed and the accused needed to prove his innocence. To the modern mind, this rule may seem unfair and even shocking at first, but in practice it favoured the accused. In the adversarial system of the Mesopotamian judicial courts, the fact that the accused, and not the plaintiff, was the one required to take an oath could offer the former a relatively straightforward means of exoneration.

Material evidence

Testimony was the main type of material evidence. A court might invite a testimony in order to establish the existence of a certain law or custom, especially in land disputes (cf. Charpin 1997 for an Old Babylonian example). In the Middle Babylonian period,

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such disputes were habitually settled by summoning local people, called 'the knowledgeable ones' (*mūdû*), who were able to establish the location of a plot or the identity of its owner (Slanski 2003: 494). At 15th-century Nuzi, lists of 'still living' witnesses are attested, naming relevant people together with the case for which they might be called (Lion 2000: no. 99): this type of document was not only useful as an aide-memoire for the court, but could prevent legal action altogether and make a trial unnecessary.

But far more often, it was the parties who called witnesses to court in order to support their claims—for example, because they had direct knowledge of the facts in civil cases or because they had witnessed a suspicious statement or an illegal act in criminal cases. It appears that it required the statements of at least two witnesses to convict the accused in a criminal trial (Cardascia 1995), including cases where the offender had been caught in the act. To give testimony was obligatory, and a witness's refusal to appear in court was punishable with a fine equal to the value of the case considered (Roth 1997: 20: Laws of Ur-Namma §29; Roth 1997: 81–82: Laws of Hammurabi §4). If a crucial witness was not able to appear immediately because he was physically absent, the trial could be suspended and resumed on the day of his appearance: a 7th-century Neo-Assyrian 'court tablet' (*egertu ša dēni*) containing the name of such a key witness attests to this practice (Jas 1996: no. 46).

Only very occasionally, witnesses felt unable to recall the details of the event in question. In an Old Babylonian divorce case, for instance, the witnesses summoned to establish the contents of the dowry which the husband would have to return to his wife claimed to have no recollection of it, given that the wedding had taken place long ago and in another city (Charpin 2000: no. 49). To deter false accusations, the law collections stipulated severe penalties for perjury, ranging from high fines (Roth 1997: 20: Laws of Ur-Namma §28) to the death penalty in the case of capital offences (Roth 1997: 81: Laws of Hammurabi §3). A party could challenge his opponent's witnesses but then ran the risk of being put under oath by the judges. Inconsistent or inaccurate evidence was discarded.

The contents of a witness statement could go beyond the mere rejection of the opposing party's allegations and establish the existence of new offences: in a trial from late 18th-century Nippur, for example, a husband who had accused his wife of disrespecting him was in turn challenged by his spouse's female witnesses, who stated in court 'that she had been abused and vilified' by her husband (Westbrook 2003d: 373).

In criminal cases, the witness statement was used to qualify the offence: for example, the difference between a married woman's rape and adultery depended on whether she resisted; if she did not shout and fight back, her consent and therefore adultery was presumed (Roth 1997: 157–158: Middle Assyrian Laws, tablet A §12). This principle is employed, for instance, during a Neo-Babylonian trial when two witnesses (who apparently did not intervene at the time) testified that a woman and her servant had been sexually attacked in a house, despite their cries of protest, thereby establishing that this was a case of rape (Jursa 2000: 498–503). In Middle Assyrian law, a particular procedure is attested for witchcraft cases in order to deal with a witness who, after denouncing a witch, might retract his statement out of fear of falling victim to a curse (Roth

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1997: 172–173: Middle Assyrian Laws, tablet A §47; cf. S. Lafont 2003: 528–529). The witness was handed over to an exorcist, who purified him and heard his testimony under oath, after which he performed an incantation involving the witness and the accused in order to prevent a potential curse.

Written documents were also used as material evidence in court but they did not suffice on their own as proof and needed to be corroborated by a witness statement or by oath. Legal documents could be used to help settle disputes over payment, ownership, or property boundaries or to establish the exact contents of a dowry in divorce cases. In Emar and Ugarit in the 14th–12th century BC, sale contracts containing the clause 'this tablet will defeat him/her' (*ṭuppu annû ila"ešu/ila"eši*) served as pre-prepared evidence and the very existence of the deed blocked a possible trial (Westbrook 2003a: 683).

Some practices suggest an increasing strengthening of the value of written documentation in court over time. For example, it was common in the second and first millennia for the seller of landed property to hand over all previous title documents to the buyer or to have them summarized in the sale contract (Charpin 1986; Joannès 1990). This did not mean that the written contract was evidence in itself, because if that were the case it would not have been necessary to give the buyer the entire history of the property sold; the sale document alone would have sufficed to prove his rights. Instead, this practice served to distinguish property acquired by purchase from that transmitted by inheritance for which the family always retained a right of redemption (Charpin 1980: 158–159). General disquiet about admitting written evidence was probably due to the relative ease with which a clay tablet could be falsified or destroyed. A Neo-Babylonian trial concerning a land dispute features two villains who had attempted to reclaim a field they had previously sold, by presenting the new owner with an alleged mortgage from prior to the sale. Faced with the purchaser's reservations, they tried to destroy the tablet with their teeth—and ended up in court acknowledging that the document was a forgery (Joannès 2000: no. 169).

Inquisitorial tendencies increased in the first millennium, taking novel forms in Babylonia, such as incriminating evidence, graphological expertise (Joannès 2000: no. 166), or torture (*maš'altu*, literally 'interrogation') to obtain confessions (San Nicolò 1933).

Supra-rational evidence

The adversarial character of Mesopotamian trials explains the frequent use of supernatural evidence in civil and criminal cases: the judge had to sentence on the basis of proof, which was not always easy to acquire, and if there was insufficient evidence he could subject a litigant or a witness to an oath, an ordeal, or another divinatory means of establishing the truth. The oath was the most commonly used of these methods.

When accompanying the testimony of witnesses the oath had decisive value, affirming their reliability, and when taken by one of the parties it had the power to completely

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exonerate their name: whoever took the oath successfully deflected the charges levelled against him or established the veracity of a fact disputed by the opponent. Any party who refused to take an oath when ordered to do so by the judge automatically lost the case, unless he succeeded in convincing his opponent to accept a compromise. The statement of a witness who refused to take an oath was disregarded. It is not clear how judges chose who should take an oath. It undoubtedly depended to an extent on the judge's intuitions: he may have stipulated an oath for those whom he thought sincere or to unmask a suspected liar. The parties could challenge the judge's choice of oath-taker, which could lead to the dispute's referral to another court (S. Lafont 1997b: 191–193 for an Old Babylonian example).

In the Old Akkadian, Ur III, and Old Babylonian periods, both parties took an oath at the end of the trial in order to preclude a re-trial, swearing not to 'return' (*târum*) to the case; the Old Babylonian verdict quoted at the beginning of this section provides an example of this. The successful party received a 'tablet of non-claiming' (*ṭuppi lā ragāmim*), which was meant to prevent any further dispute: if the same case came to court for a second time the judge was required to rule in line with the first judgment (see above).

In criminal cases, the oath allowed the accused to exculpate himself or herself quickly and indisputably, which is why, for instance, it was to be taken by the wife whose husband accused her of adultery (Roth 1997: 106: Laws of Hammurabi §131). The apparent advantage offered to women, who may have had less easy access to witnesses or written evidence, is alluded to in a proverb quoted in the correspondence of king Esarhaddon of Assyria (r. 680–669 BC): 'The words of a sinful woman have more weight at the door of the judge's house than her husband's' (Reynolds 2003: no. 1).

Taking an oath could consist of simply invoking the name of gods and/or king or else of touching a divine emblem while cursing oneself. A practice attested in Old Babylonian Mari was called 'eating the oath', which meant swallowing herbs that would turn poisonous on perjury (Charpin 1996). This example shows that the oath was in itself an ordeal; this is clear also from the practice in first-millennium Babylonia of exposing the oath-taker to the light of the stars (thought to be manifestations of the gods) in order to establish his reliability (Joannès 1996: 172–174).

The ordeal is documented from the third until the first millennium, most frequently taking place in the deified river. The ordeal was always preceded by an oath whose veracity was tested by the oath-taker's immersion in the river: the guilty sank, the innocent floated in the water. The law collections prescribe an ordeal in the case of suspected false accusations (Roth 1997: 18: Laws of Ur-Namma §13), of adultery (Roth 1997: 18: Laws of Ur-Namma §14; Roth 1997: 106: Laws of Hammurabi §132; Roth 1997: 160: Middle Assyrian Laws, tablet A §12), and witchcraft (Roth 1997: 81: Laws of Hammurabi §2), while evidence from Old Babylonian Mari demonstrates its use in political affairs (Durand 1988: no. 249). While the practice was still in regular use in the Neo-Assyrian period (Radner 2003: 891; 2005: 47) in the Neo-Babylonian period, only a literary text, already discussed above, refers to an ordeal gone wrong (Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003: 925). The story has a moral dimension, stressing that

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the guilty cannot escape the gods' wrath, but it also shows that the river ordeal, as it fell into disuse, was no longer understood as a means of providing judicial proof but instead as a form of immanent justice.

Other supra-rational processes used by the judge to determine the truth include the ritual of 'raising the gods' (*ilāni našû*; e.g. Lion 2000: no. 103) at 15th–14th-century Nuzi and a procedure involving a throw-net, as in the Old Babylonian trial presented at the beginning of our discussion of court procedure above. At 13th–12th-century Emar, divination was used in cases of incest and bestiality (Durand and Marti 2004: 5, 20), probably reflecting the corresponding practice in Hittite law, according to which cases involving 'abominations' (*hurkel*) were matters for divinatory professionals, as taboos such as incest and bestiality called for specialists whose skill would protect them from contamination (Hoffner 1997: 148–154, 224–225: Hittite Laws §§187–195).

Sentencing

The judge had the power to interpret the law: he could implement it in spirit or letter (Veenhof 1997–2000: 73–74). The very wording of the law collections, which tended to treat the subject in its extremes of true versus false, shows that all intermediary nuances were left to the judge's discretion (Westbrook 2000). The risk of arbitrariness was balanced by the rules of evidence and by the fact that judges tended to operate in groups. Sentences were generally not justified through precedent: courts did not cite customs or laws as the basis of their decisions (Westbrook 2005: 30), although some Old Babylonian documents state that a judgment was made 'according to royal decree' (*kīma ṣimdat šarrim*), without specifying its content (Veenhof 1997–2000). Beyond the appeal to the king (see above), no other methods of appeal are attested and, as we have seen, the general principle was that the judges' decision was final.

At the conclusion of the trial, a tablet recording the verdict was drawn up. It was given to the successful party in order to serve as proof of the outcome of the trial and any resulting claims. Alternatively, if the defeated party had compensated his opponent on the spot, the tablet could be handed over instead of a receipt. For the Third Dynasty of Ur, for Ugarit, and for Assyria, there is evidence for the practice of keeping records of verdicts in public archives (B. Lafont and Westbrook 2003: 193; Lackenbacher 2002: 42; Jas 1996: nos. 3, 36, 43 and 51).

Most sentences stipulated financial penalties. In criminal cases, corporal punishment is attested and frequently mentioned in the law collections. In the later periods, fines or detention increasingly replaced corporal punishment, although it is still occasionally attested in practice in the Neo-Assyrian (Radner 2003: 906) and Neo-Babylonian periods (Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003: 966). Prisons are documented for Old Babylonian Mari (Durand 1998: no. 828), and the Old Babylonian hymn to the goddess Nungal, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, describes the strength of the prison's doors and locks, which plunge the captive into darkness and terror (Civil 1993: 75). But by the first millennium, prisons were increasingly common and offered little protection for the

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convicted who, once imprisoned, were often mistreated and sometimes arbitrarily detained (Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003: 967).

Conclusion

The principal goal of this chapter has been to demonstrate that a spirit of arbitration was widespread in Mesopotamian legal life. It pervaded court procedure as judges habitually encouraged the parties to negotiate and reconciliate, at least when dealing with civil matters (our information on criminal procedure is too restricted to allow a definite opinion).

A compromise could be struck at any time until the establishment of definitive proof brought the trial to an end. The oath as a means of psychological pressure played an important role in this: whoever took the oath was very likely to win the trial, and his opponent naturally had an interest in proposing a compromise before the oath was taken, rather than facing the possibility of losing. Therefore, compromises were most frequently brokered just before the oath was to be taken—often already at the sacred ground. This is especially well attested for the Old Babylonian period, illustrated by judicial documents describing the arrangements that terminated the dispute. The following example from Sippar demonstrates this well (Démare-Lafont 2005: 75):

> (Case) concerning a donkey that Ilušu-abušu son of Sin-naṣir had rented from Warad-Enlil and Ṣilli-Eštar in (the city of) Šimurrum and (then) lost. Warad-Enlil and Ṣilli-Eštar sued Ilušu-abušu concerning the donkey, and the judges made them have a trial at the gate of (the god) Šamaš in (the city of) Sippar.
>
> The judges handed over Warad-Enlil and Ṣilli-Eštar (to the oath) by the divine symbol (*šurinnum*) of Šamaš as regards Ilušu-abušu (but instead) in (the place of) the divine symbol of Šamaš, at the ancient gate of Šamaš, Ilušu-abušu son of Sin-naṣir, Warad-Enlil and Ṣilli-Eštar reached an agreement, and they took six shekels of silver of (his assets in the city of) Zaban and ten shekels of silver of (his assets in the city of) Sippar-the-great because of their donkey.
>
> Ilu-abušu son of Sin-naṣir will not make any claim against Warad-Enlil and Ṣilli-Eštar. In the future, Ilušu-abušu son of Sin-naṣir, Warad-Enlil (and) Ṣilli-Eštar will not return (to court), and there will be no dispute of one against the other concerning the donkey.
>
> They swore together by Šamaš, Marduk, Apil-Sin and the city of Sippar.
>
> (Eleven witnesses.) Date (Apil-Sin year 11 = 1819 BC).

The frequent recourse to oaths in Mesopotamian trials, in all periods, is clear evidence for the concept of a judgment as a means to establish the gods' truth. Ideally, judicial activity in Mesopotamia aimed to protect the good and eradicate the evil, just like the gods did. The conceived close parallel between human trials at court and the implementation of divine justice is especially well illustrated by the so-called *namburbû* rituals, which were meant to undo the effects of evil (Maul 1992). They took the form of a trial in which the exorcist and his client made their case in

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front of the divine judge Šamaš, assisted by the gods Ea and Asalluhi, who passed judgment and thereby vanquished chaos and reaffirmed order.

Further reading

Roth (1997) provides English translations of the Ancient Near Eastern law collections in the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite languages. The chapters in Westbrook (2003c) survey legal institutions and conventions period by period (with comprehensive bibliographies) while the contributions in Joannès (2000) present an overview of the archival records for ancient Near Eastern jurisdiction, with numerous text samples in French translation.

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CHAPTER 17

ROYAL DECISION-MAKING: KINGS, MAGNATES, AND SCHOLARS

KAREN RADNER

> Good advice is to be heeded.…In this matter the king should listen to his servant.
>
> (Letter of the scholar Adad-šumu-uṣur to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria; Parpola 1993: no. 196)

When Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (r. 680–669 BC), imagined how his enemies made decisions he thought of them as acting on the basis of advice received from their counsellors. This is made explicit by the phrasing of some extispicy queries (see Koch in this volume) put forward to the sun-god:

> In case Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, sent a messenger of his choice to go to Kaštaritu, city lord of Kar-Kašši (a fortress in the Zagros mountains), would Kaštaritu, on the advice of his counsellors, seize, question, and kill that messenger? (Starr 1990: no. 57, 4′–7′)
>
> Will he (i.e. the king of Urartu)…, on the advice of his counsellors,…take the road from where they are to wage war, kill, plunder, and loot, and come to Šubria (a buffer state between Assyria and Urartu)? (Starr 1990: no. 18, 6–9)

While this image may not be too far removed from the reality of the royal decision-making process in Urartu and Kar-Kašši, it is more than anything a projection of how the Assyrian kings made their choices, seeking and receiving guidance from their advisors as a matter of course.

Ruling as the earthly representatives of Aššur, Assyria's supreme god, the Assyrian rulers presented themselves in their official inscriptions as the sole creators and maintainers of the Assyrian Empire, and in this they followed the conventions of Mesopotamian royal inscriptions since the third millennium BC (Radner 2005: 153–155).

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But contemporary archival texts—letters, reports, and administrative records—speak another language, which shows them supported by administrative, military, and cultural elites, in Assyria and beyond (Lanfranchi 1997). Those men participated on all levels in building and running an empire which, from the mid-8th to the late 7th century BC, stretched far beyond the Assyrian homeland to include all of Iraq and most of Syria, wide sweeps of eastern Turkey and western Iran, and almost the entire eastern Mediterranean coast.

This chapter focuses on the role of two distinct groups of advisors to the Assyrian king and their impact on royal decision-making: the highest state officials, or magnates, and scholarly experts in the royal entourage.

The magnates

All regions formally incorporated into the 'land of Aššur', to use the contemporary designation for Assyria, were organized as provinces and administered by governors (*pāhutu* or *bēl pāhete*, 'proxy') who were appointed at the king's discretion (Radner 2006). While they had no other claim to their office, they were, as the king's chosen representatives, all-powerful on a local level. It was of paramount importance to Assyria's cohesion that the king could rely on their loyalty and trust them absolutely.

By the late 8th century, most neighbouring states were allied with Assyria, which meant that, although nominally independent, they had to take Assyrian policy into account as a matter of course. After the invasion of 671 BC even Egypt, which had formerly been in the influence sphere of the kings of Kush (modern Sudan), belonged to the Assyrian block. Delegates (*qēpu*, 'trusted one') of the king of Assyria advised the rulers of allied states and reported directly to their master.

Together with a small group of high officials with traditional titles such as 'palace herald' (*nāgir ekalli*; Figure 17.1) and 'chief cupbearer' (*rab šāqê*) (Mattila 2000), who in actuality were the most senior Assyrian state officials, these governors and delegates constituted the 'magnates' (LÚ.GAL.MEŠ = *rab*(*b*)*ûte*, literally 'the great ones'; cf. Parpola 1995: 379 n. 1 on the Neo-Assyrian realization of the logogram). The magnates comprised a set of about 100–120 men who formed the backbone of the Assyrian Empire, instrumental in its creation and indispensable to its maintenance.

At least from the early 9th century onwards, these magnates were preferably drafted from a class of professional administrators rather than the members of the ancient noble families who in previous periods had occupied hereditary positions of power within the Assyrian state (e.g. Cancik-Kirschbaum 1999). This innovative policy was designed to secure the king's position and at the same time ensure that posts were awarded on merit rather than through family ties—a key strategy for stabilizing the expanding state. Many of the magnates were eunuchs (*ša rēši*, 'he of the head'; an ancient term for personal servant) whose physical inability to father children was designed to ensure their loyalty to the king. Moreover, men who became eunuchs gave up their family connections in

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FIGURE. 17.1 Stela of Bel-Harran-belu-uṣur, palace herald under Shalmaneser IV and Tiglath-pileser III, and eponym of the year 741 BC: from Dur-Bel-Harran-belu-uṣur, modern Tell Abta, Iraq (Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri, inv. no. 1326). (Photo reproduced from Unger 1917: pl. 1)

order to serve the king, often taking a new name in the process (Deller 1999: 306). The original backgrounds of the Assyrian eunuchs therefore remain entirely obscure. This is not just the accidental result of the chance survival of the available sources, but part and parcel of the eunuch identity. Having no family of their own, their allegiance belonged first and foremost to the king, who seems to have regarded them almost like adopted children. Most significantly it was the king, and his royal successors, who were responsible for the eunuchs' care after death (Deller 1999: 307).

Not all high state officials were eunuchs, however. The crown prince, who was part of this select group, is an obvious exception, while those 8th-century kings who came to the throne without having been appointed crown prince by their predecessor—Tiglath-pileser

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III (r. 744–727 BC) and Sargon II (r. 721–705 BC)—are very likely to have held high state offices before they usurped royal power. Did they not need to be eunuchs because they were members of the royal family? In the absence of information about the personal backgrounds of known eunuchs the argument easily becomes circular.

Our best sources for the relationship between the king and this second level of political power is the royal correspondence unearthed in the state archives of Kalhu and Nineveh. Comprising about 1200 surviving tablets, the letters exchanged between Sargon II and his magnates constitute the most voluminous sub-corpus (edited by Parpola 1987; Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990; Fuchs and Parpola 2001; and Dietrich 2003; Figure 17.2). The letter-writers habitually refer to themselves only by name, not by office, but many of Sargon's correspondents acted as 'year eponym' (*limmu* or perhaps better *līmu*). Although still little understood today, this key position within the Assyrian state was assigned annually and its holder consequently lent his name to the year in which he held the office; this had been the traditional Assyrian way of designating individual years since the early second millennium (Dercksen 2004: 52–62). As a consequence, the names and titles of many of Sargon's correspondents can be found in the Assyrian Eponym List (Millard 1994), which gives us an understanding of their respective official roles within the empire. Many of the correspondents of Tiglath-pileser III, attested in the so-called Nimrud Letters (Saggs 2001), can also be identified in this manner. In the 7th century BC, the professional nature of the men holding the position of year eponym changed (cf. Mattila 2009).The identification of the letter-writers of the political correspondence of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (r. 668-*c.* 630 BC) is therefore less straightforward (edited by Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002; Reynolds 2002; and in forthcoming volumes in the series State Archives of Assyria). If the unsolicited petitions and denunciations addressed to these kings are disregarded, then the content of the remaining letters would seem to imply that they, too, represent a similar range of officials to those attested in the 8th-century royal correspondence.

The scholars

Chosen for his royal office by the gods, the king of Assyria was expected to rule according to their design. The gods were thought to communicate their wishes through ominous signs encountered everywhere in the natural world (Rochberg in this volume). The king relied on scholarly advisors to monitor and interpret these divine messages and to perform the rituals necessary to keep the precious relationship with the divine powers in balance. As the Babylonian literary composition *Advice to a Prince*, a copy of which is also known from Assurbanipal's library, has it: 'If [the king] has no regard for his scholarly advisors, his land will rebel against him' (Foster 2005: 867). While a number of contributions in this volume, by Barbara Böck, Ulla Koch, Anne Löhnert, and Daniel Schwemer, discuss the scholarship of these experts, the present chapter is concerned with their participation in the royal decision-making process.

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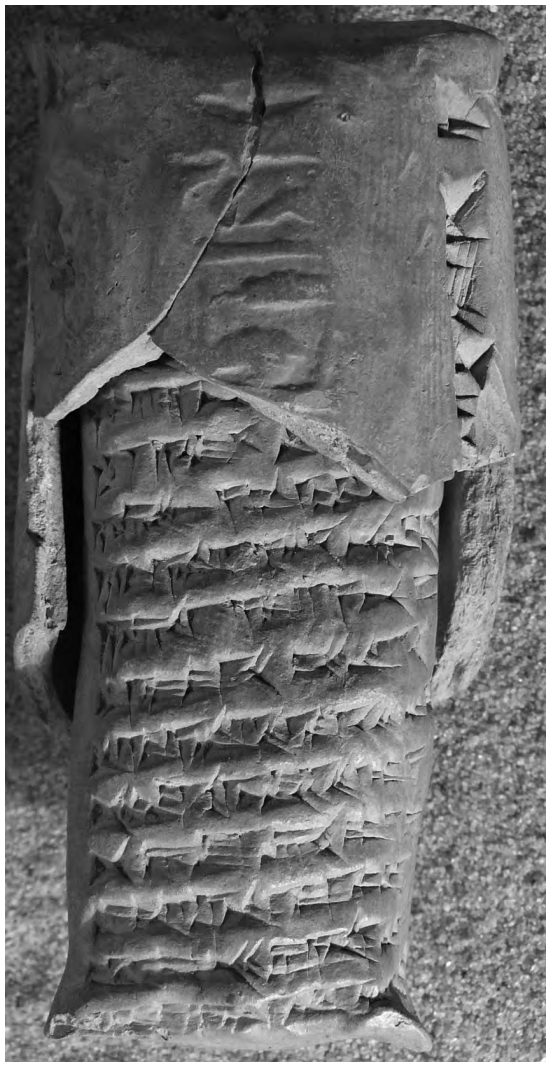

FIGURE 17.2 Letter from the correspondence of Sargon II, found with its envelope intact; it was opened only in the British Museum (BM, 81–7–27, 199 and 81–7–27, 199A; Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: nos. 288, 289). The letter reveals why it was never read. A man who had lost his job sent it to his superior as the fourth of a series of missives, without ever receiving a reply to his pleas: 'Why is my lord silent (while) I wag my tail and run about like a dog? I have sent three letters to my lord. Why does my lord not consent to send an answer to (my) letter?'. (Photo by Greta Van Buylaere. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

Our best sources for the relationship between the king and his scholars are the *c.* 1300 documents of the correspondence between Esarhaddon and his son and successor, Assurbanipal (r. 669–*c.* 630 BC), and some of their astrologers, extispicy experts, exorcists, physicians, and lamenters (edited by Hunger 1992; Parpola 1993 (with additions in Luukko and Van Buylare 2002 and Reynolds 2002); and Starr 1990). Correspondence between earlier Assyrian kings and their scholars, as far as it may have existed, has not been recovered by modern excavations, yet there is ample evidence for scholars in the employ of the kings from royal inscriptions (Fales and Lanfranchi 1997), various archival texts (e.g. Radner 2009: 231–238), and even the wall decorations of the royal palaces (Reade 2005; and see Frahm in this volume). These sources indicate that the Assyrian

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kings of the 9th and 8th centuries, too, employed scholarly advisors of various disciplines. This is not surprising, as in doing so they simply followed a well-established convention that is also attested for the Assyrian kings of the second millennium BC (Jakob 2003: 518–537) and earlier Mesopotamian rulers such as Zimri-Lim of Mari (Charpin in this volume).

Unlike the magnates, scholars were only very rarely eunuchs; among all known learned specialists, only two extispicy experts are thus designated (Starr 1990: nos. 300, 337). The main reason for the relative rarity of eunuch scholars was probably the fact that for learned men, temple offices offered the main alternative to a career in the king's entourage, and as those required the holder to be physically intact (Löhnert 2007), castration would have made this career path impossible.

In stark contrast to the magnates' obscure origins, we are rather well informed about some of the scholars' family backgrounds, as they took great pride in their ancestry and family ties and frequently mentioned their family connections when corresponding with the king; additional information can often be found in the colophons of library texts (Hunger 1968). The scholars saw themselves very much as part of a wider kinship group, often working alongside their brothers, fathers, uncles, sons, nephews, or cousins. Some Assyrian and Babylonian scholarly families maintained close relationships with the Assyrian kings over generations. Several scholars in the entourage of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, for example, belonged to a family whose members can be shown to have continually occupied prominent positions in the royal retinue from the late 10th century onwards (Parpola 1983: XVII-XIX; Frahm 1999: 78–79; Luukko 2007: 229). Clearly, descent from a long line of scholars and/or kinship with other scholars in the king's entourage was thought to enhance the authority an expert could claim on the basis of his own talent and qualifications.

The scholars received their basic training in the paternal household and, as they tended to work in teams (Robson 2011: 608), continued to learn from their colleagues throughout their lives. There was a rudimentary hierarchy in place, with the younger scholars being seen as the 'apprentices' of their more senior colleagues: 'The apprentices should imitate and assist them' (Parpola 1993: no. 385), as one letter has it in regard to astrologers (cf. also Parpola 1993: nos. 160, 167, 171, 221, 294). The emphasis on teamwork, however, was combined with a very healthy dose of competition (cf. Kuhrt 1995: 525; Robson 2011: 608), judging from the surviving correspondence, scholars—the astrologers especially—tended to disagree with each other in matters of interpretation as often as they were of one opinion.

Different relationships with the king

The link between the king and the scholars in his entourage has been aptly described as patronage: a personal voluntary long-term relationship between a socially dominant patron, namely the king, and his socially inferior clients, namely the scholars, based on

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the mutual exchange of goods and services, patronage is a flexible relationship shaped by privileges and obligations, favours and expectations, quite separate from the rights and duties of office (Westbrook 2005: 211, 222/2009: 218, 232). While the occasional scholar entertained a sense of entitlement that is quite at odds with the language of affect used by the majority in their communications with the king (Westbrook 2005: 222–223/2009: 232–233), it is clear that the scholars depended on their royal patron's goodwill, with no formal claims to their position. As the king is quoted saying in one 7th-century letter:

> My servant has looked after me; let me do my servant a favour. The first token of my favour is: I will assign to him the leadership of scholars. My second favour is: As long as he is in Assyria, let him be near me. (Parpola 1993: no. 182)

However, there were two official scholarly posts, namely the position of royal tutor (*ummânu*; also a general term for expert) and that of chief scribe (*rab ṭupšarri*) which sometimes were held by the same person—for instance, Nabu-šallimšunu during the reign of Sargon II (Thureau-Dangin 1912: l. 428). The role of the royal tutor was to educate the crown prince, who as king also retained the services of his old teacher. While there was a first-millennium tradition of compiling lists which matched kings, including those of Assyria, with their respective *ummânū* (Kuhrt 1995: 524; Frahm 2003: 158; Zamazalová in this volume) and thus celebrated the role of the royal tutors, the office does not seem to have had great visibility beyond scholarly circles. It did, however, provide a guaranteed income and a clearly defined, protected role for its holder, moreover one that he could expect to hold for his lifetime. The other scholarly office was that of chief scribe, not to be confused with the palace scribe (*ṭupšar ekalli*), who was a high administrative official in charge of the state accounts, also doubling as the king's personal secretary. The chief scribe, on the other hand, was responsible for organizing the king's cultic diary and making sure that all associated needs and requirements regarding personnel, venues, and literature were met (Luukko 2007: 251–252). To this end, he frequently coordinated the activities of other scholars in the royal retinue without, however, being formally in charge of them: their allegiance was directly to their patron the king. The composition of royal inscriptions was another responsibility of the chief scribe, and possibly also of the royal tutor (as argues Frahm 2003: 157–158), although in this case their roles are difficult to disentangle.

Even the most valued scholars in the king's entourage did not belong to the highest echelons of the court (e.g. Parpola 1993: no. 226; cf. Westbrook 2005: 228/2009: 239–240), let alone of Assyrian society. The magnates, on the other hand, certainly were part of that elite group, formally appointed to a high office that was indispensable for the existence of the state. Their link with the king was a bureaucratic one, an impersonal relationship based on rules meant to ensure fair treatment. A letter from Kiṣir-Aššur, the governor of Dur-Šarrukin under Sargon II, provides a good example:

> As to the houses of the recruitment officers, about which the king, my lord, wrote to me: 'The houses are already built, you are deceiving me in order to give them to your servants!'—as if I did not tell the truth to the king, my lord! Let a royal eunuch who

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> will tell the king, my lord, the truth come and have a look at these houses of the recruitment officers! If they are already built, let him go and tell it to the king, my lord, and let the king, my lord, hold his report to my discredit and say: 'Why do you not tell me the truth?' (Parpola 1987: no. 124)

Kiṣir-Aššur, who had only recently succeeded Šep-Aššur as the governor of the royal residence city of Dur-Šarrukin, stood accused of embezzlement and dishonesty, very serious accusations which for others would have carried the risk of death (Radner 2003: 905–906). Refuting these accusations, he demanded an official inquiry—clearly, he knew himself and his interests to be well protected by the rules governing his appointment.

The very different nature of the relationships between king and scholars and king and magnates, respectively, resulted in fundamental differences in how advice to the king was presented. We must, of course, primarily rely on the written sources for this judgement but we can certainly assume that the letters mirror the conventions which also governed personal encounters. The magnates, it would appear, were able to approach the king on an almost equal footing, at least as far as this was possible while observing the necessary notions of appropriateness and politeness. Their letters are introduced with a bare minimum of greetings formulae, usually only: 'To the king, my lord: your servant PN. Good health to the king, my lord.' The scholars' letters, on the other hand, would at the very least add a blessing such as 'May (the gods) Nabu and Marduk bless the king, my lord!', with optional additions, such as 'May Aššur, Bel and Nabu give happiness and joy to the king, my lord!' (Parpola 1993: no. 61), or, in more elaborate versions, 'May Nabu, Marduk, Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela give long lasting days, everlasting years, happiness and joy to the king, my lord!' (Parpola 1993: no. 83) or 'May Aššur, Šamaš, Bel and Nabu bless the king, my lord, and let the king, my lord, attain his desire!' (Parpola 1993: no. 123). The blessings formula was omitted on inauspicious days, probably in order not to curse the king inadvertently: '(Since) this is a gloomy day, I did not send the (introductory) blessing' (Parpola 1993: no. 76). The deep social chasm dividing king and scholars is clearly apparent from the very beginning of their letters.

The language of the magnates' letters, however, is factual, even, as we have seen, when faced with royal accusations and suspicions. There is no place for the wheedling, coaxing, and pleading which are commonplace in those parts of the scholars' letters that do not concern their professional assessment. Compare only the succinct 'Whatever the king, my lord, commands' (Parpola 1987: no. 227) from a typical magnate's letter to the rather more adulatory 'You are able, wise and circumspect: may the king do as he sees best' (Parpola 1993: no. 112) in a typical scholar's letter. This difference in language reflects the differing relationship with the king—patronage versus formal appointment—but also the fact that while the scholars wrote their letters themselves the magnates, although literate (Parpola 1997), had theirs written by centrally trained, professional scribes employed as their secretaries. As is evident from the quotes given throughout this chapter, the scholars' letters are much more immediate, personal, and emotive in tone—the missives of private individuals rather than office holders.

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Passing on divine messages

In a scholar's own words, it was his moral duty to advise his king:

> If I had not addressed the king today, wouldn't the king say to his servant (i.e., the letter-writer) tomorrow: 'You were a servant of my father; why didn't you advise and instruct me?' (Akkullanu to Assurbanipal; Parpola 1993: no. 90)

Ever since A. T. Olmstead, in his still influential *History of Assyria* (1923: 347), saw the Assyrian king under the 'ghastly control' of his scholars, popular views of Assyria have included visions of superstitious kings at the mercy of sinister svengalis and their corroding, self-serving machinations, construing the scholars' role in royal decision-making as essentially negative. However, in his commentary on the scholars' letters, Simo Parpola (1983: XVIII–XIX) stressed 'the overwhelmingly passive and "academic" nature of their advisory role', highlighting how their advice was usually offered in response to a particular question or as a reaction to specific circumstances which, given that they worked on the basis of established scholarship and in competition with other experts, left little room for any alleged Machiavellianism.

The king used the scholars as expert advisors, soliciting their recommendations on specific matters within their particular range of expertise:

> [The king, my lord], is made like a sage; he has understood her (i.e., the goddess Ištar's) counsels,…[As to what the king], my lord, said: 'He who knows this matter should speak out—is it true?'—[who could possibly give] any kind of counsel to the sun (i.e., the king)? (Issar-šumu-ereš to Assurbanipal, attributed on the basis of the handwriting; Parpola 1993: no. 29)

While the insurmountable social gap between the ruler and his scholars frequently led the latter to profess that they were not fit to counsel the king whose learnedness (cf. Frahm and Zamazalová in this volume) they liked to praise and sometimes, as in the present case, overstate, there can be little doubt that the scholars in the royal entourage represented the elite of their respective disciplines. Competition was fierce and only the best could hope to attract and maintain the king's patronage (see, e.g., Parpola 1993: no. 160 for a catalogue of qualifications and achievements of twenty hopefuls from Babylonia).

However, the Assyrian kings extended their patronage to a comparatively large number of scholars. In one year, most probably 670 BC, Esarhaddon's (r. 680–669 BC) scholarly entourage at the royal court of Nineveh alone consisted of forty-five experts. An administrative record (Fales and Postgate 1992: no. 1; cf. Radner 2009: 222; Figure 17.3) lists thirty-six experts representing the five main branches of Mesopotamian prognostic and remedial scholarship, followed by three augurs working in the Anatolian tradition (*dāgil iṣṣūri*, literally 'bird watchers'), three ritual experts in the Egyptian scholarly tradition (*harṭibu*) and three 'Egyptian scribes' (*ṭupšarru Muṣurāyu*). The thirty-six Mesopotamian scholars break down into twelve prognostic and twenty-four remedial experts: seven astrologers

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FIGURE 17.3 Administrative record from the royal archives of Nineveh listing forty-five scholars at court (British Museum, K 1276; Fales and Postgate 1992: no. 1). (Photo by Mikko Luukko. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

(*ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil*, literally 'scribe of the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*') and five extispicy experts (*bārû*) on the one hand and nine exorcists (*āšipu*), nine physicians (*asû*), and six lamenters (*kalû*) on the other: twice as many therapeutic specialists as diviners. The Mesopotamian scholars outnumber the nine experts in Anatolian and Egyptian scholarship fourfold, a discrepancy which probably reflects the Mesopotamian disciplines' greater importance to the king. Yet the very presence of experts trained in the Anatolian and Egyptian scholarly tradition in Esarhaddon's Ninevite retinue is highly significant. Not only does it illustrate an interest in 'foreign' scholarship beyond cuneiform culture; but as the 'foreign' scholars used methodologies that differed fundamentally from their Mesopotamian colleagues but were applied to the same prognostic and therapeutic ends, they can be seen as their royal patron's 'control group' of scholars, useful in order to falsify or verify the Mesopotamian scholars' results.

The presence of 'foreign' experts was quite likely an innovation of the reigns of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. Although augurs had been known at the Assyrian court at least since the reign of Adad-nerari III (r. 810–783 BC) (Radner 2009: 231), as

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dignitaries from abroad, the first augurs in the royal entourage would seem to date only to the reign of Sennacherib (Radner 2009: 236). Prior to Esarhaddon's conquest of Egypt in 671 BC, when specialists of various disciplines were moved from Memphis to Nineveh in droves (Radner 2009: 223–224), Egyptian scholars would not have been readily available to the Assyrian kings. Indeed, the new policy can easily be seen as a reaction to the discovery that the astrologers and extispicy experts in Sennacherib's entourage had made a pact not to disclose any bad omens to their royal master, as the astrologer Bel-ušezib reminded his patron Esarhaddon:

> In the reign of your royal father (Sennacherib), Kalbu the son of Nabu-eṭir, without the knowledge of your royal father made a pact with the scribes (i.e., astrologers) and extispicy experts, saying: 'If an untoward sign occurs, we shall tell the king that an obscure sign has occurred.' For a period of time he (i.e., Kalbu) censored all […s] if a sign untoward to him (i.e., Sennacherib) occurred, and that was anything but good. Finally, when the *alû* (disease) had come, [he (i.e. Sennacherib) said: 'If a sign] that is untoward to me occurs (again) and you do not report it to me, […].' The scribes (i.e., astrologers) and extispicy experts took heed of these words, and by [the gods of the king, they reported] every portent that occurred during the reign of your royal father, and your royal father did stay alive and exercise the kingship. (Parpola 1993: no. 109)

The pact between astrologers and extispicy experts meant that the traditional strategy to verify or falsify the astrologers' reports by means of a pertinent extispicy query to the sun-god could no longer be successful. If the extispicy experts' necessary disciplinary isolation (cf. Robson 2011: 610–611) had been breached the king's faith in his scholars' reliability needed to be restored by other means, and the services of experts using other methodologies must have been highly welcome to that end.

The purpose of Anatolian augury was, after all, identical to that of Mesopotamian extispicy: to receive a confirmation or rejection of a question put forward to the gods. The basic principles governing augury, too, mirror those of extispicy. The augurs interpreted the behaviour of wild birds, observed in their natural habitat and/or the behaviour of captive birds (Figure 17.4), and added up individual observations regarding their movements in the sky, spotted in a certain area and at a certain period of time, to a total result which was either positive ('the birds confirm it') or negative ('the birds reject it') (Ünal 1973: 33–34, 55–56). This matches the way the extispicy experts combined observations gained from a sheep's liver into a positive or negative end result. It is obvious that by soliciting an answer to a specific question to the gods from both augurs and extispicy experts the king exercised quality control over both sets of scholars. The Egyptian ritual experts (Radner 2009: 223–225) may have fulfilled a similar function in regard to the Mesopotamian exorcists. Although the exact function of the 'Egyptian scribes' (Radner 2009: 225) remains unclear it stands to reason that they, too, provided an alternative to a Mesopotamian methodology.

However, not one of the surviving 1500-odd scholarly letters and reports from the royal archives of Nineveh is a communication by any of the experts trained in the remedial and prognostic traditions of Anatolia and Egypt, and only some of the Mesopotamian experts mentioned in the administrative list are also attested as letter-writers. Astrologers are

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FIGURE 17.4 Funerary stela of Tarhunpiyas, showing him in a state of eternal bliss in his mother's embrace: from Maraş, modern Turkey, late 8th century BC (Louvre, AO 19222). The tame falcon and the writing tablet and stylus identify Tarhunpiyas as an augur. Monuments of this sort are typical of the Neo-Hittite states of Anatolia and northern Syria. (For the hieroglyphic Luwian inscription see Hawkins 2000: 274–275; see also Weeden in this volume.) (Photo from the Louvre's website: www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/)

responsible for the bulk of the surviving written material, with 567 reports and over 170 letters. However, these communications did not all originate from the scholars at the royal court of Nineveh but were written by astrologers active all over the empire, who were all required to inform the king about auspicious sightings (cf. Villard 2008: 181, 184–187 for reports from Assur). Communications from extispicy experts follow in second place, with 354 liver omen reports but just twelve letters, mostly about petitionary matters. The scarcity of letters authored by extispicy experts can be explained by the fact that the final stage of the divinatory process—presentation and discussion of the findings—required face-to-face meetings with the king, which provided regular opportunities for personal communication (Robson 2011: 618) and rendered written approaches unnecessary. Unlike the diviners, the remedial specialists were not required to submit written reports of their findings and their 'paper trail' is therefore considerably smaller: there are about 130 letters from exorcists, but only twenty-four from physicians and just nine letters from lamenters. Clearly, the number of surviving texts creates a very different impression as to the relative importance of the different fields of Mesopotamian scholarship to the kings of Assyria than the roster from 670 BC, in which the therapeutic experts outnumber the diviners twofold. The relative dearth of material originating from lamenters and physicians needs to be taken into account

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when trying to assess the scholars' role at court. While the 7th-century documents from Nineveh offer by far the best evidence for scholarly patronage known from antiquity, they shed light only on Esarhaddon's and Assurbanipal's dealings with the representatives of Mesopotamian scholarship, and only of select individuals.

In open dialogue with the king

A depiction of king Sargon II in conversation with a high official, quite possibly his crown prince Sennacherib, gives us an idea of the personal encounter between the king and his magnates: without his bodyguards and attendants, the king faces the official—who as a sign of distinction and royal trust wears his sword—eye to eye (Figure 17.5).

FIGURE 17.5 Sargon II in conversation with a magnate, probably crown prince Sennacherib: detail of a stone relief from the royal palace at Dur-Šarrukin, modern Khorsabad, Iraq (Louvre, AO 19873–4). (Photo by Karen Radner)

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Sargon's magnates frequently mention private discussions with the king. For instance, a letter from Ṭab-ṣill-Ešarra, governor of Assur, recalls: 'As I said in the presence of the king my lord' (Parpola 1987: no. 75); similarly, Taklak-ana-Bel, governor of Naṣibina (Parpola 1987: no. 240) and Šamaš-belu-uṣur, governor of Der (Fuchs and Parpola 2001: no. 121). The king, too, occasionally referred to advice received in conversation with his counsellors (e.g. Dietrich 2003: no. 3). According to the surviving letters, Sargon's magnates offered their opinions on all matters of governance, state policy, and strategy, as had the officials who had served his father Tiglath-pileser III. This most successful of Assyrian conquerors had been surrounded by advisors who were every bit as hawkish as he, to judge from some of the extant correspondence:

> When the king, my lord, ascended to Urartu before (i.e., in 743 BC), the gods Aššur and Šamaš delivered Turušpa (i.e., the Urartian capital, modern Van Kalesi) into the hands of the king, my lord, and (therefore) the king, my lord, may lead his campaign against Urartu! May they capture Turušpa and may the king, my lord, immortalise his name! (Saggs 2001: 136–137, pl. 27; cf. Radner 2005: 95)

In this case, we know for certain that the king chose not to follow the suggestion, despite the fact that the letter-writer was able to call on detailed information of recent Urartian manoeuvres and even the favourable pronouncements of an augur in the entourage of the king of Šubria, an Assyrian ally (Radner 2009: 233–234). Clearly, one counsellor's opinion, however convincingly argued, did not suffice to initiate royal action.

Simo Parpola (1995: 393) suggested that there was a 'comprehensive meeting of all magnates (referred to as "the assembly of all the lands" in contemporary letters)' which was 'a public event serving as a visual demonstration of the royal power and the unity of the empire'. However, the only two available references to this 'assembly of the lands' (quoted Parpola 1995: 393 n. 44) undoubtedly refer to a Babylonian institution rather than an Assyrian one. If the magnates ever did meet regularly *en masse*, then one of the main religious events of the Assyrian calendar, such as the New Year festival celebrated at the city of Assur, would offer a more convincing setting. But it should be remembered that most of the magnates were dispatched to a province of their own or to a foreign court, where they were expected to represent the king on a permanent basis. Assembling them all for a sort of state council would have been a logistical challenge, although not an insurmountable one: after all, they each had a deputy who could handle local affairs in his absence.

There were certainly occasions when all magnates could be expected to come together, most crucially when a new king ascended to the throne and assigned the state offices, either reappointing his predecessors' officials or making new choices (Wiggermann 2006: 94–95). But surely productive meetings would have involved smaller groups. When a governor who found himself confronted with one of his subordinates' accusations replied to Sargon II that 'The king's magnates are assembled; let us settle (the dispute) in the presence of the Treasurer' (Parpola 1987: no. 236), he referred to a decision-making body that included the king and an unknown number of the highest-ranking officials of whom the treasurer was one. The treasurer was singled out here

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because his office qualified him best to give a ruling in the disagreement, which concerned the levy of taxes.

This letter provides a rare insight into what happened when the king was petitioned (Radner 2003: 887, with previous literature), as the letter-writer's subordinate had done. The eventual outcome was the 'king's word' (*abat šarri*) but our text indicates that the king was expected to pass judgment in consultation with his counsellors. However, it remains unclear whether they were especially summoned to form a board with specific members or whether the panel consisted of whoever of a certain rank happened to be in the king's presence. Another letter mentioning the magnates taking counsel is unfortunately too fragmentary to offer any additional insight (Fuchs and Parpola 2001: no. 307).

The annual military campaigns regularly brought the king—who normally participated, with the notable exception of Assurbanipal (Fuchs in this volume)—together with at least a selection of magnates and governors, who tended to take personal lead of the troops dispatched from their provinces (e.g. Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: no. 152). Weeks and weeks of being together on the move, and in the temporary confines of the military camp, presented excellent opportunities for frequent and close encounters between ruler and magnates. Diviners, too, were then with the army, as shown by texts (e.g. Parpola 1987: no. 14; Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: no. 215) and scenes on palace reliefs (Reade 2005: 15–19, 42–49 figs. 10–17; cf. also Koch in this volume, Figure 22.2). One such illustration shows Sennacherib's camp in the year 701 BC (Figure 17.6): the king is seated on his throne and attended by his adjutants, while a soldier leads a group of unarmed men into his presence. Around this central scene, unfortunately incomplete, are arranged depictions of various activities taking place in the busy camp, inside and outside the tents, including two men slaughtering a ram on a sacrificial table and inspecting its entrails.

Given that their findings represented messages from the gods, we can expect that the diviners' reports provided a useful starting point for discussions of military strategy and other matters. The relatively vague and often ambiguous nature of the diviners' interpretations based on observing the natural world can be seen as enabling debate by allowing the advancement of a variety of different viewpoints on the basis of this external information.

The available written sources do not contain details of such discussions but there are some hints that may help us in recreating the nature of the discourse. Two letters of Bel-ušezib, a Babylonian astrologer in Esarhaddon's entourage (Parpola 1993: nos. 111–112), contain not just celestial omens and their interpretation but also concrete suggestions as to how to apply the divine messages in the ongoing war against Assyria's eastern neighbour state Mannea. Andreas Fuchs (this volume) has labelled Bel-ušezib—who had little knowledge of Mannea's geography and the conditions on the ground—an 'armchair strategist' but what is of interest to us is that he was willing and even eager to offer concrete strategic advice while allowing for the possibility that others would see the situation differently and suggest a different approach. Rather than assuming that divination would dictate a certain choice, the astrologer saw his own observations and interpretation as a starting point for strategic considerations that would naturally draw also on additional information: 'The lord of kings should ask an expert of the country' (Parpola 1993: no. 111,

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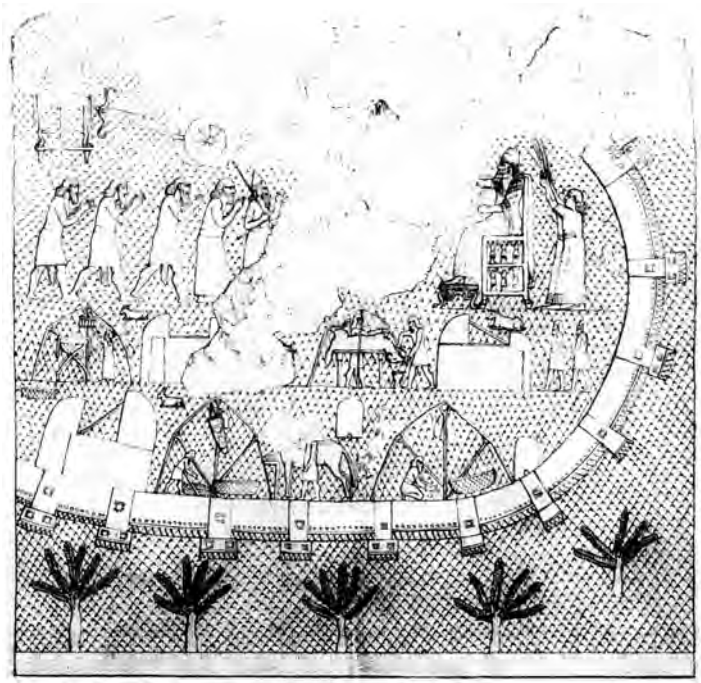

FIGURE 17.6 Sennacherib's military camp in 701 BC, with an extispicy taking place in one of the tents: detail of a stone relief from the Southwest Palace at Nineveh. Detail of a stone relief from the Southwest Palace at Nineveh. (Drawing by A.H. Layard (Or. Dr. IV, 61), reproduced from Reade 2005: 49, Figure 17, with permission)

rev. 11). Moreover, Bel-ušezib was not afraid to criticize the king's decision: 'If the king has written to his army: "Invade Mannea," the whole army should not invade; (only) the cavalry and the professional troops should invade.' (Parpola 1993: no. 111, 9–12). Bel-ušezib's letters highlight the advantages of using divination to initiate discussions between the king and his counsellors, facilitating open dialogue that was far less restricted by hierarchy and court protocol than a debate predicated on human opinions alone. The joint analysis of existing problems and expected challenges on the basis of divine messages, ambivalent due to the twin filters of imperfect human observation and interpretation, would have provided a powerful tool in the decision-making process.

Royal security was severely tightened by Esarhaddon after Sennacherib, then king of Assyria (r. 704–681 BC), was murdered at the hands of his own sons, and then again after a conspiracy against Esarhaddon himself, involving several of the highest-ranking officials, was uncovered in 670 BC (Radner 2010). But the magnates continued to occupy an elevated position in the empire and their personal meetings with the king continued (e.g. Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002: nos. 45, 134). Despite increased personal distance from the king they were nevertheless expected to 'tell it as it is'. A passage from the loyalty oaths that Esarhaddon imposed in 672 BC when he appointed his son Assurbanipal as crown prince makes this clear:

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> You shall not do for him what is not good, nor give him an improper counsel or direct him in an unwholesome course, but continually serve him in a true and fitting manner. (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: no. 6, 233–236).

But it appears that under Esarhaddon the roles of magnates and scholars, previously so clearly kept apart, were no longer strictly separate. Some scholars, no longer simply passive providers of information, became official policy-makers. The Babylonian Mar-Issar, who represented Esarhaddon's interests in Babylonia, is the best example of this trend. He was both a scholar, offering regular astrological advice and organizing the king's Babylonian cultic diary, and a high state official, albeit of unknown title (see above for the difficulty in identifying the offices of 7th-century magnates). His preserved letters (Parpola 1993: nos. 347–370) are a colourful mixture of administrative and scholarly information and recommendations. One such letter may serve as an example (Parpola 1993: no. 364): Mar-Issar first suggests that a bridge across the canal at Borsippa be constructed, moves on to propose building works in temples across Babylonia, then reports on the activities of other Assyrian agents in Babylonia, before presenting a summary of recent celestial sightings and his interpretations of these occurrences. The astrologer Bel-ušezib, a fellow Babylonian, may have aspired to a similar role when he volunteered his services as a strategist to Esarhaddon. This promotion of scholars at the expense of the traditional magnates must be seen in the context of the ongoing and intensifying demotion of the highest state officials during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, a policy whose origins can be traced back to Sennacherib's decision to shift power away from the magnates to the members of his immediate family (Radner 2008: 510; cf. Mattila 2009).

The burden of the final decision

A standard formula in the royal grants of Assurbanipal's reign makes it clear that the king was normally expected to heed the advice of others—by stressing the entirely independent nature of his decision-making in the particular cases documented in the grants in question. These documents, which confer landed property and tax privileges to merited officials, stipulate that the king made the decision to reward them 'at the prompting of my own heart, and according to my own counsel' (Kataja and Whiting 1995: nos. 25, 26, 29), a phrase designed to preclude any notion that the king had been manipulated, by the recipient or others, into making the gift.

While the conventions governing the phrasing of royal inscriptions obscure this, the Assyrian kings otherwise openly acknowledged the fact that they made the overwhelming majority of their political decisions with the help of others and on the basis of expert advice. We have tried to analyse the different roles that the magnates and the scholars played in this regard and found that these roles did not remain unchanged throughout the history of the Assyrian Empire but were continually redefined in reaction to events, such as the discovery of a pact between different groups of scholars to withhold negative

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information from the king, the murder of Sennacherib, or the conquest of Egypt with the consequent influx of new experts into the Assyrian court.

But though the contribution of various counsellors to royal decision-making was considered vital, the king was still expected to take full public responsibility for the final decision. Assurbanipal's successor, however, the young Aššur-etel-ilani (r. *c.* 630–627 BC), not only stood in the shadow of his chief eunuch Sin-šumu-lešir but also allowed himself to be portrayed as his pawn in official documents:

> After my father and begetter (i.e., Assurbanipal) had departed, no father brought me up or taught me to spread my wings, no mother cared for me or saw to my education. The Chief Eunuch Sin-šumu-lešir, one who had deserved well of my father and begetter, who had led me constantly like a father, installed me safely on the throne of my father and begetter and made the people of Assyria, great and small, keep watch over my kingship during my minority, and respected my royalty. (Kataja and Whiting 1995: nos. 35 and 36)

The last statement does not seem to have convinced the king's contemporaries any more than the modern reader. The resulting disrespect for the king certainly contributed significantly to Aššur-etel-ilani's downfall, with opposition against Sin-šumu-lešir and the boy king quickly rising both in Assyria and Babylonia. The deep hatred for Sin-šumu-lešir exhibited in the Nabopolassar Epic, which celebrates Babylonia's eventual emancipation from Assyria's overlordship (Tadmor 1998), seems to have been rooted not so much in the fact that he was a representative of Assyrian power but that he had assumed authority illegitimately. Instead of contenting himself with an advisory role, he had taken on the executive function customarily reserved for the monarch, to the extent that at some point Babylonian documents were dated according to regnal years in Sin-šumu-lešir's name (da Riva 2001).

The situation of the time of Aššur-etel-ilani and Sin-šumu-lešir has clear parallels in the mid-9th century and again in the early 8th century, when the Assyrian monarchy had also been weak, and magnates such as Dayyan-Aššur, the commander-in-chief from 855 to 826 BC, and in the first half of the 8th century Nergal-ereš, the governor of Raṣappa, and the commander-in-chief Šamši-ilu had effectively controlled the affairs of the state (Fuchs 2008). But these consecutive *éminences grises* were atypical of the counsellors of that majority of Assyrian kings who were capable of fulfilling the requirements of their office and prepared to shoulder their key responsibility. To make the final, and correct, decision: this, more than anything, was the foremost duty of the 'wise king' (Frahm, this volume). The reigns of these able kings, amongst whom we can certainly count Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal (at least in the first part of his reign), were marked by an equilibrium of power between multiple advisors whose influence neutralized each other and stabilized the state.[1]

[1] This chapter was written as part of the research project: 'Mechanisms of commmunication in an ancient empire: the correspondence between the king of Assyria and his magnates in the 8th century BC', funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council from 2008 to 2012.

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Further reading

The classic work on the Assyrian and Babylonian scholars in the entourage of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal is Parpola (1983), while Radner (2009) focuses on those specialists trained in the Egyptian and Syro-Anatolian scholarly traditions. Despite its occasional recourse to a now outdated Marxist–Leninist vocabulary, Pečírková (1985) remains a valuable analysis of the interplay of divination and politics in the Assyrian Empire. Fales and Lanfranchi (1997) discuss the same topic, with a focus on the relevant references in royal inscription.

Mattila (2000) is a collection of all references for seven of the most senior offices in the Assyrian state. There is no comprehensive study of the Neo-Assyrian administration but Postgate (2007) provides a useful sketch of its general setup.

The letters from the published State Archives of Assyria volumes are now all online at http://oracc.org/saao/.

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CHAPTER 18

ASSYRIA AT WAR: STRATEGY AND CONDUCT

ANDREAS FUCHS

At the height of her power Assyria dominated the core areas of all the great ancient Near Eastern civilizations, from Egypt to Iran, from Babylonia to Anatolia. The territories under her direct, as well as indirect, rule represented a huge land mass, which surpassed all former empires by a factor of at least four. We should ask ourselves what led to this unprecedented expansion. Obviously it cannot be attributed to an intrinsic advantage on the Assyrian side. The Assyrian heartland was of moderate size only, its population neither more numerous nor significantly more productive than its enemies. Assyria was not fanaticized by new ideas or ideologies either, and every advance in military technology was immediately shared by all Near Eastern contemporaries. The Assyrian kings were no charismatic leaders and their wars did not produce a military genius—there was no Assyrian Alexander, Genghis Khan, or Bonaparte whatsoever. According to the Assyrians' own official point of view, the help of their gods was the main reason for their success, but there was no shortage of supportive gods among their enemies either.

In fact, the rise of Assyria can be explained by the peculiar historical setting of the later 10th century and the developments leading to it. Assyria had already been a great power centuries before, but in the 13th–12th-century political context Assyria had been just one Near Eastern empire among others and by no means the most powerful one. The universal decline of the 11th century and the political chaos of the 10th deprived the empires of their power bases and some even disappeared completely. Assyria did not emerge unscathed from the crisis years either but at least her core area and her institutions had survived more or less intact. Even in her weakened condition Assyria now towered like a giant over a multitude of dwarfs. The revival of Assyria began during the last decades of the 10th century. Her armed forces developed slowly but steadily and they grew in size faster than the armies of the newly emerging rival powers. The Assyrian kings used their armies cautiously and successfully, giving their troops a lead in numbers, experience, and competence, advantages which they maintained for no less than three centuries.

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The sources and the ideal image of the king at war

We have almost no information on the Assyrian army of the 10th century. For the 9th the situation is much improved by inscriptions and pictorial evidence from the reigns of Assurnasirpal II (r. 883–859 BC) as well as Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BC), but almost nothing survives from the first half of the 8th century. The bulk of information comes from the heyday of empire between 745 and 638 BC. The kings of this period again left inscriptions with detailed accounts of their campaigns and depicted their victories on low-relief stone carvings all over the walls of their palaces. But in addition to such official reports, which were meant to commemorate royal achievements for generations to come in the most favourable light possible, original documents from the imperial administration as well as day-to-day correspondence between officials at different levels of the military hierarchy have come down to us. These include letters by the king himself as well as powerful magnates, provincial governors, and many army commanders of lesser rank.

By far the most impressive sources are the royal inscriptions and the palace reliefs. Taken together, they provide detailed information on soldiers, weapons, and all kinds of equipment. We can follow the Assyrian army on its marches and crossing rivers, and have a look at the soldiers in their camp. Most dramatic are the battles, sieges, and, last but not least, the merciless pursuit of the fleeing enemy. Together these sources construct an extremely one-sided picture, showing the Assyrian monarchs as they wanted to be seen by future generations. At the very heart of the ideological message is the tale of the irresistible, ever-victorious, heroic, and completely reckless king (Figures 18.1a, 18.1b). As an example, take the following part of a report on a battle given by an inscription of Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC). The king is confronted by the numerous forces of a vast enemy coalition:

> I raged like a lion. I put on the coat of armour; I placed upon my head the helmet, this ornament of fighting. I quickly mounted my excellent battle chariot, which smashes the foe, in the anger of my heart. I seized in my hands the mighty bow, which the god Aššur had given me; I grasped the life-cutting arrow. Against all the hosts of wicked enemies I raised my voice like a thunderstorm; I roared like the storm-god Adad. At the order of Aššur, the great lord, my lord, I charged like the onset of a hurricane at their flanks and front. With the weapons of Aššur, my lord, and my furious onslaught, I made them waver, I forced them to flee. I mowed down the enemy host with arrows. (Borger 1979: 84, ll. 67–81; author's translation)

Leading every single attack in person and from the front, omnipresent, throwing themselves happily into the very midst of battle, rushing on, yelling, shooting, killing, in breathtaking races to glorious victories: that is how Assyrian kings wanted to be remembered. But the conspicuously small number of Assyrian kings actually killed in battle tells us that reality must have been different. Danger freaks, such as the king sketched by Sennacherib's inscription, would have died early and in rapid succession.

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(a)

(b)

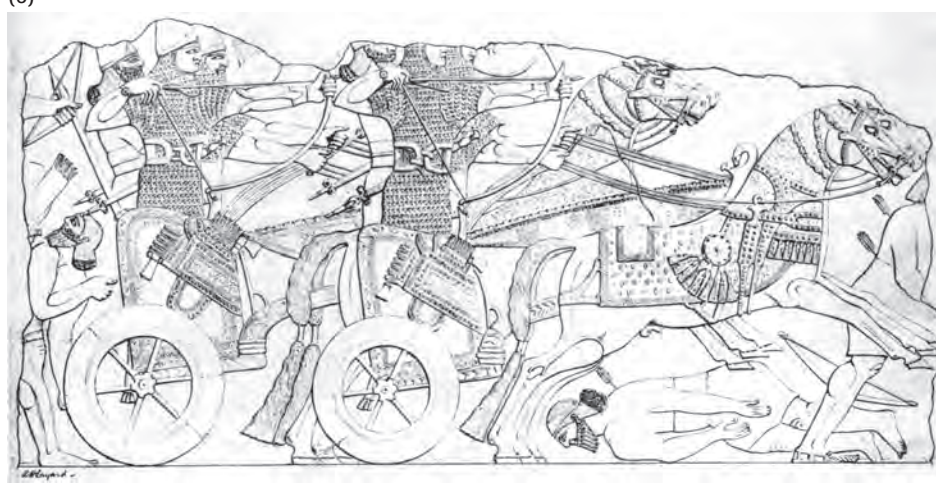

FIGURE 18.1 (a) The heroic king in court dress, leading the charge. (b) Chariot crew in full armour, a rare and probably rather realistic depiction of the fighters and their equipment. Details of a stone relief from Assurnasirpal's Northwest Palace at Kalhu, modern Nimrud, Iraq, 9th century BC. (Drawings by A.H. Layard (Or. Dr. III: S.W. VII), reproduced from Barnett and Falkner 1962: pl. CXVI)

A disillusioning glimpse of royal Assyrian behaviour in the real, mundane world is provided by a courtier's or magnate's admonition to Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC):

> Of course, the king, my lord, should not go to the midst of battle! Just as the kings, your ancestors, have done, take position on a hill, and let your magnates do the fighting! (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002: no. 77, rev. 3–8; author's translation)

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This message was written without propagandistic intent, for it was meant not for future generations but for the king's eyes (or ears) only. Here we have the voice of reason. Because the Assyrian empire was focused to a large extent on the person of its monarch a king's demise was always critical. Even if the question of succession had already been resolved, the king's sudden death on the battlefield was likely to plunge the whole system into complete disarray. In their own inscriptions the kings portrayed themselves as fighting maniacs, bereft of any sense of danger, but to behave like that in real life would have been irresponsible madness which jeopardized the whole empire. Esarhaddon's father, Sennacherib, was certainly among those ancestral kings mentioned by the magnate. So even if we cannot exclude the possibility that Sennacherib indeed raised his voice and roared in battle, as claimed by his inscriptions, we can definitely say that if he had done so he must have roared from a safe distance!

Battle reports—facts or fictions?

Sennacherib's inscription, as cited above, exemplifies how combat was portrayed in order to leave a lasting impression of the king's glory to future generations. For the composers of such heroic constructs, realism and accuracy were not amongst their top priorities. But what about the non-propagandistic sources, as for instance the messages that the kings received directly from their field commanders? The following extract of a report, sent to king Assurbanipal in about 650 BC, gives some impression of Assyrian small-scale warfare. Bel-ibni, the sender of the letter, was an Assyrian general based in the Sealand (the gulf coast of southern Iraq), whose task was to devastate the Elamite territory (modern southwest Iran) situated on the opposite shore of the Gulf:

> When I sent 150 (men) against the districts of Akbanu and Ale, on the opposite bank of the river Takkatap, they killed many soldiers there and took 130 prisoners. They burned down Akbanu and Ale. But when Amurru-zera-ibni, Yadadanu, Bihayatu, the son of Mahiranu, sheikh of the Halat-people, as well as Laqe, son of Hallalla' and their troops, 400 bows altogether, figured out the route of the servants of the king, my lord, they took a position behind the river Nahal to ambush the servants of the king, my lord. The servants of the king, my lord, therefore took another road and made use of a ford 3000 cubits upstream of them. Here they accomplished the crossing of the river until (all of them) had reached the other side. Afterwards they went straight for them. When the servants of the king, my lord, realized the great number of the soldiers downstream of them, and since they would have their hands full (once the fighting had begun), they killed all the prisoners they had taken. And they said to each other: 'We are 14 double-miles from the Sealand! If we have to die, let us die with an honourable reputation!' Since the gods of the king, my lord, stood by his servants, they killed 17 soldiers of them and hit 60 or 70 more (before) they (i.e., the enemy soldiers) fled. Among the

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> servants of the king, my lord, only 20 soldiers have been hit. (Vaan 1995: 266–267, obv. 9–rev. 10; author's translation)

At first glance, this seems to be a truly authentic report, but the heroic elements of the story must arouse our suspicion. Moreover, the report on the event, a skirmish won against all odds, was the result of at least two interventions, both of them made by subordinates who could hope to rise in their master's favour if their success was noticed. The returning soldiers certainly tried to impress their general; the general in turn seized the opportunity to please his king. It has always been a courtier's most important skill to know how to exaggerate his merits to maximum effect without carrying it too far. As for the report just quoted, no independent source is available to help us to estimate Belibni's abilities as a courtier or the deviation of his report from the actual event.

Now, if the generals and soldiers exaggerated their victories, what about the king's own advisors (Radner in this volume)? Can we assume we get reliable information from those men, at least, who helped the ruler to make his decisions? For an answer take the following example. When Esarhaddon made plans to invade the Mannean kingdom in western Iran, a possible intervention by Cimmerian warriors had to be taken into consideration. Assyrian diplomats had already reached an agreement with the Cimmerians, but these strange horse nomads, who seemed to come from the back of beyond, could not be trusted. A certain Bel-ušezib advised his king, Esarhaddon, how to avoid an ambush:

> If the king has written to his forces: 'Invade (the territory of) Mannea!' not all the forces should invade; only the cavalry and the seasoned troops should invade! As for the Cimmerians who said: 'The Manneans are at your mercy, we will keep out of this!' perhaps this was a lie; they are barbarians to whom an oath sworn by god or a treaty means nothing! The chariots and baggage train should stay side by side in the pass, while the cavalry and the seasoned troops should invade and plunder the countryside of Mannea and come back and take position in the pass. If, after they have invaded and plundered once or two times, the Cimmerians have not advanced against them, the whole force can enter and throw itself against the cities of Mannea. (Parpola 1993: no. 111, obv. 9—rev. 4; author's translation)

We can easily imagine the mountain pass and the less mobile army units waiting there, while detachments of cavalry and skirmishers swarm out in order to lure the enemy into a premature attack by which he would reveal both his position and his true intention. But how close was all this to the real situation in Mannea? The advice seems plausible and we might think of Bel-ušezib as a military expert who knew the local terrain by heart. But in fact he was not even a member of the armed forces. His many letters to the king make it clear that he was a scholar working in Nineveh, whose advice was based on the interpretation of astrological omens! As he admits later on in the same letter, he did not have the faintest idea about the realities of the Mannean landscape:

> I am writing to the king, my lord, without knowing the exit and entry of that country. The lord of (all) kings should ask an expert on the country, and the king should

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> (then) write to his forces as he deems best. (Parpola 1993: no. 111, rev. 9–13; author's translation)

Suddenly we find the armchair strategist in full retreat! Perhaps he had realized that he might have jeopardized his own comfortable position at Esarhaddon's court: if his advice proved right, others would step in afterwards to share the success. However, if the scheme misfired, the sole advocate of the idea was likely to fall out of favour with the king. So it was well advised to find additional supporters for one's own ideas, preferably people of sound competence on to whom responsibility could be shifted in case of trouble.

We do not know how the 'expert on the country' assessed Bel-ušezib's advice, or even if his idea was discussed at all. There are certain hints that in 676 a campaign against Mannea was broken off after initial success, and we know for sure that the kingdom of Mannea was not defeated in Esarhaddon's reign. Bel-ušezib was just one out of a multitude of experts and advisors. He certainly tried to do his best but at least in this special case, his advice did not lead to victory.

Misleading pictures

Similar problems affect the reliability of the pictorial evidence. For example, according to Sennacherib's inscription quoted above, the king put on his helmet and his body armour before going to battle, but for the artists it was of primary importance to identify the king by his royal insignia. Therefore, in images, kings are always shown wearing their ceremonial gown, even in combat scenes. Another example is the way chariots are depicted. Probably for mere reasons of artistic economy, no more than one type of Assyrian chariot is ever shown on the reliefs made for any one king, whereas administrative sources list the names of several chariot types (Dalley and Postgate 1984: 34; Postgate 2000: 96). Of course, portraying a chariot was a rather ambitious task, so perhaps the artists were happy to have mastered the difficulty of depicting just one type and reused their drafts whenever needed.

Further, there are qualitative as well as quantitative differences in the equipment of Assyrian and enemy soldiers as seen on the palace reliefs. While the Assyrians generally appear well armed, the enemy warriors are shown badly equipped and unprotected, even unarmed or naked. This is in clear contradiction to the evidence provided by the written sources, which tell us that the Assyrians and their enemies used the very same range of weapon types and armoury. At this point, we have to remember the intention behind the images as well as behind the official texts. There was never any intention to convey a precise picture of real events. Instead they depict only the key episodes, which, taken together, tell us not what actually happened, but what should have happened. As a consequence, enemies had to be depicted as ill equipped and badly armed in order to avoid the slightest doubt about the outcome of the battle shown.

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The gods at war

Only people with no personal experience of war could be convinced of Assyria's invincibility by the images of the hero king and the impressions of clean and happy warfare shown on the wall reliefs in the royal palaces. For those who actually took part in the campaigns and shared the risks and uncertainties of real warfare, these images were no more than expressions of their wishes and may be interpreted even as magical invocations of future victories.

Of course, the Assyrian troops and their leaders made extensive use of all possible religious means to guarantee supernatural support for their dangerous business. From the army's departure until its return every stage of a campaign had to be accompanied by rituals and sacrifices to please the gods, and afterwards the priests expected a substantial share in the loot carried home by the soldiers. Such gifts were expressions of gratitude as well as advance payments for future services. But for those fighting, divine support had to be even more concrete and practical. The gods, in the form of standards showing their images, accompanied the soldier on the march; they rested with him in the same field camp; and they fought side by side with him. To this purpose, each standard had its own chariot on which it could be mounted. In battle, the god stood in his vehicle and charged, visible to all (Pongratz-Leisten, Deller, and Bleibtreu 1992: 351, 2.2.1.1.).

In addition, secret knowledge offered ways to get significant advantages over the enemy without physical combat. Scholars who specialized in a bewildering range of highly diversified magical practices accompanied the king on his campaigns. Some could read specific signs warning of impending dangers, while others mastered the rites necessary to get answers from the gods on questions regarding matters such as the enemy's next moves or the outcome of an ongoing operation (Starr 1990; Koch in this volume). And last but not least there were those who knew how to incite the gods' wrath against the enemy, in order to bring upon him disease, despair, and disaster, even fire raining down from the sky (Fuchs, 2010: 417–419).

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, we might laugh at all of this apparently naïve mumbo jumbo. But even if the underlying assumptions were complete nonsense by our standards, these ideas and behaviours had massive repercussions in the real world. Certainly the rituals calmed fears, bolstered confidence, and convinced the soldiers to fight for a just cause, while the practice of secret knowledge must have strengthened confidence even in the most desperate situations. Without doubt, for a fighting force such morale boosts are at least as valuable as any superiority in numbers or technology. In those cases, therefore, the ideals shaped reality.

The 'huge hosts of Aššur'

From the end of the 10th century the Assyrian kings steadily increased the numerical strength of their forces and improved their equipment. By the second half of the 8th century the army's strength was enough to deter all but the most powerful enemies and

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coalitions from risking a pitched battle against the Assyrian juggernaut. According to the language of royal propaganda, the invading 'huge hosts of Aššur' could now cover an enemy's territory to its full extent, like 'a swarm of locusts' or 'a fog'.

The Assyrian armed forces were not a national army in the modern sense. The troops of the Assyrian heartland proper were always reinforced by additional forces from the outside, and when the empire grew in territory the proportion of provincial troops and armies of vassal kings increased accordingly. But not even the provinces of the extended empire could meet the insatiable need for soldiers. Therefore prisoners of war, even complete armies of defeated states, as well as various auxiliaries were incorporated (Dalley 1985). As a result, the armed forces of Assyria became a rather colourful, multi-ethnic entity whose heterogeneity as a side effect helped the kings to maintain control over their forces. Separated by their different backgrounds, the constituent parts of the army probably kept each other in check and competed for the king's favour instead of forming an alliance against him. In the 7th century soldiers of almost a dozen different ethnic backgrounds served in the palace guards. The principle of divide and rule seems to have worked: so far as we know, no Assyrian king ever met the fate of so many Roman emperors and Abbasid caliphs, who ended up as mere puppets of their own armed forces (Fuchs 2005: 51–55).

In fact, the 'huge hosts of Aššur' consisted of several armies, which differed considerably in size, structure, origin, and combat value. The core was the 'royal contingent', which comprised the elite units led by members of the royal family. Each of the great cities of the Assyrian heartland contributed an army unit and the same was expected of every powerful magnate and every province (Dalley and Postgate 1984). Vassal kings commanded their respective armies, while the warriors sent by allied tribes formed small ethnic contingents of their own. As for the soldiers recruited within the empire, the relative proportions of conscripts and volunteers are unknown. Most soldiers probably received a piece of land in return for their services, but there must have been some forms of payment in cash for mercenaries and for auxiliaries of nomadic origin. As in most armies, the main incentive to fight at all must have been the soldier's share of the expected spoils of war. In this respect, however, the prospects were more than promising, because the Assyrians were usually the winners. The king was also expected to take care of those who had lost their health in his service. Sennacherib, for instance, was proud to call himself 'the one who gives help and assistance to the cripples' (Borger 1979: 68, I 5–6).

An all-round central administration comparable to that of modern armies, painstakingly registering every aspect of military life down to the last bit of equipment, did not exist in the ancient Near East. Instead, every unit was to some extent an organism, each with resources of its own. For instance, an Assyrian governor was completely responsible for his province's contingent. He was to provide equipment, food, housing, and payment, and was expected to keep his contingent at a certain numerical strength through recruitment. The men probably served on a rota: every year, a certain proportion of the troops, led by the governor in person, joined the field army, while their comrades stayed behind under the command of the vice-governor to keep up public order and to defend the province if necessary.

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The 'huge hosts of Aššur' were far too heterogeneous to have a standardized structure. At least among the core troops such ranks as 'commander of ten' or 'commander of fifty' suggest units of standardized strength. Moreover, contingents of 2000 foot soldiers appear frequently. The written sources mention four different armed forces, identified by the Assyrian military jargon as 'wheels' (chariots), 'horses' (cavalry), 'bearers of the bow' (bowmen fighting on foot), and 'bearers of shield and spear' (spearmen fighting on foot). The ideal composition of a substantial Assyrian force at the end of the 8th century is provided by an inscription of Sargon II (r. 721–705 BC), who deployed in his endangered northwestern provinces '150 wheels, 1500 horses, 20,000 bearers of the bow and 10,000 bearers of shield and spear' (Fuchs 1994: 179 n. 410). Accordingly, the ideal composition of an Assyrian army regarding chariots, cavalry, and infantry seems to have been 1:10:200, while among the foot soldiers the ratio between long-range fighters and close combat troops was 2:1. A numerical strength of more than 30,000 men may seem extraordinary, but it has to be remembered that this force was a detachment only, albeit a very strong one. The size of the main army must have been even more impressive, but for its overall strength no reliable numbers are available.

The strategic level: Enemies on all sides and in different theatres of war

Surrounded by enemies on all sides, Assyria never had the privilege of being able to concentrate on just one foe alone. Most of the time, the strike power necessary to guarantee success could only be achieved if the available forces were concentrated into one single army. As a consequence, within any given year Assyria's armed forces could be present in no more than a single theatre of war. Before the beginning of each campaigning season, the objective had therefore to be chosen wisely. Once the army was on the move, any attempt to redirect it to another region would have resulted in a lamentable waste of time. After northern Mesopotamia had been brought under firm control, the Assyrian kings engaged in several theatres of war, each with its own distinctive features.

To the north there was the kingdom of Urartu, Assyria's main rival in Iran and Syria. The Urartian army was no match for the Assyrian forces, and the Urartian kings were wise enough never to attack the Assyrian heartland directly. But their own mountainous realm was accessible only via difficult passes and they had studded their entire territory with numerous castles. These could not be taken by force and neither was it possible to starve them out, because the Assyrians always had to retreat before the onset of winter closed the high mountain passes with snow and ice.

To the west, in Syria and the Levant, numerous highly civilized kingdoms of moderate size and power were just the victims the Assyrians wished for. The Syrian kings were rich but constantly at loggerheads and therefore unable to coordinate their well-equipped but small armies into joint defence for any substantial period of time. However, they had

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invested some of their riches in surrounding their cities with massive fortifications, and to reduce just one of them could take the Assyrians up to three years. Nevertheless it was in the west that the Assyrian military machine achieved its most lasting victories.

To the south of the empire stretched the endless wastelands of the Syrian and Arabian deserts. In these waterless ranges the army fulfilled police duties in order to keep in check the nomads, who, from the Assyrian point of view, were nothing but thieves and bandits living in tents.

To the southeast, in modern-day southern Iraq, several holy cities—among them the prestigious city of Babylon itself—plus half a dozen Chaldaean tribal kingdoms and many dozens of Aramaean tribes together constituted the confusing political mess called Babylonia. The rivalries between the various leaders of all these cities and tribal groups always ruined any effort at united defence. Moreover, their troops may have been numerous but were of inferior quality and easy to rout. But they never gave up completely and in each generation Babylonia had to be conquered anew. Even worse, their eastern neighbour, the powerful and well-organized kingdom of Elam (in modern southwest Iran) made a habit of supporting Babylonian war efforts against Assyria. Once the sizeable Babylonian rabble was reinforced with professional Elamite troops such a combination could be a real challenge even to the battle-hardened Assyrian veterans. Taken together, Babylonia and Elam were the most troublesome of Assyria's many opponents.

To the east, on the Iranian plateau, the Medes inhabited a vast territory. They comprised numerous chiefdoms, almost every one of which seemed to specialize in horse-breeding. But extreme political fragmentation made them easy prey to Assyrian forays, even those carried out by forces of minor strength. Right up to the very last years of Assyria, absolutely no danger at all was to be expected in this area.

At greater distances, the mountain ranges of the Taurus were crossed in order to fight against several enemies in central Anatolia, while in the southwest the temporary conquests of Egypt by Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c*. 630 BC) marked peaks in Assyria's prestige.

The operational level: The art of campaigning

According to the fiction propagated by their inscriptions, the Assyrian kings led their army to victory in every single year. Reality was somewhat different, as at least some years can be identified for almost every Assyrian ruler in which the army stayed at home. But even so, it was quite normal for Assyria to be at odds with several of her neighbours at the same time. Small-scale raiding along the common border of two bickering great powers was the normal state of affairs, while large-scale warfare set in if one side achieved successes intolerable to the other or if one adversary, usually the Assyrian king, had an overwhelming advantage over his enemy and decided to get rid of him once and for all.

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As soon as the king had decided which of his enemies was to be attacked, he had to summon his troops, who were distributed all over the empire between campaigns. Initially the army was formed near the capital. Later on, after the empire had grown in size, the troops could be ordered to assemble at a border fortress. As long as the army units moved from one province or vassal kingdom to the next, they made good progress, since all cities and fortresses of any importance functioned as supply depots and no time was lost foraging. Once outside home territory, however, the situation changed completely.

In stark contrast to their official boasting of recklessness, the Assyrian rulers handled their army with great caution. This is not surprising, after all: if your very existence depends on the only army you have, you had better think twice before taking unnecessary risks. On enemy territory, the Assyrians built fortified camps at least at each stage of their advance, perhaps even for each night, but the sources are not clear on this point. While the bulk of the army was usually kept together as closely as possible, small detachments and raiding parties swarmed out, in search of food supplies as well as to observe the enemy's movements.

Campaigns sometimes covered extreme distances. For instance, the Assyrian troops who sacked Thebes in Egypt in 664 were operating 1800 km away from their capital city of Nineveh (Eph'al 1983: 99). According to the descriptions the Assyrian kings commissioned, three, sometimes four, campaign types can be distinguished: raids, conquests, sieges, and naval operations.

Raids

The army advanced deep into enemy territory, plundering, killing, and burning all along the way in order to destroy the enemy's livelihood. Leaving their supply depots far behind, the troops had to live entirely from the land, so the advance proceeded with the highest possible speed in order to give the enemy no time to organize their defence or to secure their precious food stores, which were also desperately wanted by the invaders. The attackers were always on the move; they could not afford to stay anywhere for any length of time. Therefore it was the open countryside which suffered most; fortresses and cities could only be taken by surprise or had to be ignored completely. Shalmaneser III's campaign to the Mediterranean in 858 (Yamada 2000: 77–108) and Sargon II's deep advance into Media in 713 (Fuchs 1994: 121–122, 184–190) are examples of such raids. Both operations covered large distances—Sargon's even reached the eastern fringes of the known world—and both caused considerable damage but they did not result in lasting gains.

Conquests

The king campaigned within a more limited area, usually not far from the nearest supply depot on the Assyrian border, with the intention of incorporating the attacked region into his empire. The efforts put into conquests were more intensive than those directed to raids, and successive campaigns could be necessary to complete the subjugation of the local population. Since rebellions were to be expected before the new territory became an

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integral part of the empire, local settlements, favourably situated on movement avenues—fords and mountain passes—were soon transformed into Assyrian strongholds. Between the campaigning seasons the garrisons of these fortresses were expected to hold in check any remaining enemies and to gather stores of food, oil, wine, and fodder from the surrounding countryside. An example that can be followed in detail is the conquest of Zamua, a rather small stretch of land of modest wealth in the mountains of modern Iraqi Kurdistan. Adad-nerari II (r. 911–891 BC) and Tukulti-Ninurta II (r. 890–884 BC) made some efforts in this direction, building a powerful fortress in the midst of Zamua. Even so, it took Assurnasirpal II (r. 883–859 BC) two campaigns in 881, one in 880, and probably an additional one in the very last years of his reign, as well as the construction of a second fortress, to complete the conquest of Zamua (Liverani 1992: 45–56). Military operations always revolved around the same few clusters of settlements, which had to be conquered time and again until the surviving inhabitants gave in at last.

Sieges

Of all military operations, the most ambitious task by far was to besiege a large and well-defended city, whose inhabitants were ready to endure the hardships of war. Accordingly, large-scale sieges were regarded only as a last resort and avoided whenever possible. The reasons are obvious: any direct assault against city walls resulted in heavy losses so, in most cases, there was no alternative but to starve the defenders out. As a result, an army conducting a siege operation had to settle down in one single place for a prolonged period of time. The increased logistical burden and the crowded living conditions within the besiegers' camp often combined to make hunger and disease the defender's most fearsome allies. In 701, for instance, Sennacherib was forced to lift the siege of Jerusalem because of the outbreak of an epidemic among his soldiers. As a solution to these problems, the Assyrians withdrew the army as soon as possible and left behind no more than a small force, which could be supplied with ease. These troops were distributed over siege castles built around the beleaguered city by the army prior to its withdrawal. Based in these fortifications, the detached force continued to harass the defenders and denied them the use of the surrounding countryside until they were ready to surrender (Fuchs 2008: 57).

Naval operations

As a mere land power, Assyria had no navy at all. Whenever the need arose to fight at sea, the Assyrians had to rely on the fleets of their seafaring vassal kingdoms along the Mediterranean coast. When Sennacherib planned a surprise attack via the Persian Gulf against the coast of Elam, his transport fleet was built by Phoenician shipbuilders and manned by Phoenician sailors. The Assyrian king himself never set foot in his ships and when the fleet set sail for the Elamite coast he stayed behind and watched this spectacle from the safety of the shore (Frahm 1997: 14).

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Military intelligence and the triumph of Sargon II

Great significance was attached to military intelligence as a prerequisite for victory. We know, for instance, that when Sennacherib was still crown prince he evaluated intelligence reports coming in from the northern frontiers and summarized them for his father, Sargon II. The Assyrians maintained an efficient spy system and on campaign their reconnaissance usually seems to have been ahead of the enemy's (Dubovský 2006). This lead in intelligence gathering was the basis for outwitting the enemy by deception. Its importance is evident from the extremely successful operations carried out by Sargon II in 714. He had been at war with the Urartian king Rusa I almost since he had come to power over ten years earlier, but had seen no significant success. In 714, however, Sargon twice managed to lull his enemy into a false sense of security, and the resulting victories decided the century-old rivalry between the two empires once and for all in Assyria's favour.

The campaign of 714 took place in the mountainous regions of northwestern Iran, where both sides were trying to expand their spheres of influence. Urartian territory had been attacked from this direction the year before, so when the Assyrian army appeared on the scene again the Urartian king was expecting a second Assyrian invasion and had his own troops ready. But then the Assyrian marching columns surprisingly changed direction and took a road leading to the lands of the Medes. The Assyrian king, so it seemed, had chosen another victim, and for this year at least, Urartu would be spared (Mayer 1983: ll. 1–50).

But as soon as Sargon was sure that the Urartian scouts had lost contact, he changed direction again and headed back towards Urartu. An extended detour via remote paths helped to conceal the secret approach, so when the Assyrian army finally reached enemy territory the Urartians were taken completely by surprise. Rusa now hastened to reassemble his army, which he seems to have disbanded in the wake of the false all-clear. While the Urartian reconnaissance was failing to gather precise information on the whereabouts of the invaders, the Assyrian scouts had located the exact rallying point of the Urartians and found out that their army was not yet ready for action. Without hesitation Sargon took his chance, rushed forward with his troops, and fell upon his enemy, who was yet to reorganize his troops. Taken by surprise again, the Urartian forces suffered a crushing defeat (Mayer 1983: ll.51–160).

The Assyrians followed up the destruction of the enemy's field forces with an extended and devastating raid straight through Urartian territories around Lake Urmia. The destruction of the Urartian army had left them undefended, but now the highly efficient Urartian warning system proved its worth. Wherever the Assyrian raiders appeared the inhabitants had already been evacuated, together with their movable possessions (Mayer 1983: ll. 162–305). Accordingly the amount of booty taken was smaller than expected, which was frustrating for Sargon because the prospect of extensive looting was necessary to keep his soldiers happy. Fortunately he found an opportunity to comply with his men's wishes. Not far from the return

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route, the ruler of the small kingdom of Musasir, situated between Assyria and Urartu, was trying to maintain good relations with both his powerful neighbours. Consequently both suspected him of treason. Finding a reason for sacking the city was no problem (Mayer 1983: ll. 309–312), but if the king of Musasir realized Sargon's intention in time, the inhabitants would flee as the Urartians had done and the Assyrians would find nothing but empty houses. So once again, the hunter had to creep up on his prey.

After they had left behind the Urartian territory, the 'huge hosts of Aššur' used the main road to return home. Any observers sent by the king of Musasir could see endless marching columns of chariots, horsemen, carts, and foot soldiers thudding back to Assyria. Occupied by this reassuring sight, no one noticed the detachment of selected troops, led by Sargon himself, which was secretly approaching the city of Musasir via difficult and rarely used mountain paths. Again the surprise was complete: the city was taken without resistance and all the treasures of her palace and her famous temple fell into Assyrian hands (Mayer 1983: ll. 313–410). In every respect, the campaign had developed into a stunning success.

Weapons and battle tactics

For the whole period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the bow was by far the most prestigious weapon. An Assyrian king conquered foreign lands not with his sword or his spear, but with his 'mighty bow'. The bow was the weapon of the chariot fighter, it was used on horseback and the bulk of the foot soldiers were bowmen too. Slingers also fought at long range, but they are rarely mentioned. Javelins were in use by less developed people only, such as Nubian warriors and some inhabitants of the Zagros mountains to the east of Assyria.

The melee weapons—single-handed spears, short swords, daggers, and maces—all allowed the use of the shield, the most common defence weapon, which appears in a great variety of sizes and shapes. The Assyrians never invented heavier, two-handed melee weapons; even their maces lacked the spikes necessary to puncture armour plates. Hence it seems likely that body armour was rarely encountered. Helmets of different shapes existed, but most soldiers probably had to do without them. The most expensive lamellar cuirasses consisted of bronze or iron rectangular scales attached to a leather underjacket. These must have been worn only by the chariot troops and perhaps a few selected cavalry and infantry units.

The Assyrian military establishment was technologically rather conservative (Zutterman 2003). Traditional, well-known equipment was steadily improved, but during 300 years of constant warfare not a single new weapon was invented. Likewise, new ideas and concepts developed by others were adapted only hesitantly. The Assyrians had no lead over their enemies in the use of iron weapons. A horseman armed with shield and helmet is depicted in the palace of an upper Mesopotamian Aramaean petty king already in about 950 BC, whereas in Assyrian sources cavalry troops are neither mentioned nor depicted before the 9th century.

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The most prestigious piece of equipment was the chariot, a two-wheeled vehicle drawn by two or three horses in the 9th century, and later by four horses. The minimum crew consisted of an archer, who was the commander and sometimes even the owner of the chariot, and the driver. Up to the 9th century, the chariots' cab provided no protection against incoming missiles. In battle the crew as well as the horses were clad in armour. The crew members' armour covered the whole body down to the ankles and must have been extremely cumbersome, especially as military operations usually took place in the searing heat of the Middle Eastern summer. But the armour's protective strength considerably lowered the risk of getting wounded or killed, which mitigated all such inconveniences. For further protection, the crew was augmented by a shield bearer, who functioned as 'intelligent armour'. During the 8th century the chariot's size was increased and it was now drawn by four horses. Successive enlargements of the wheels, to greater than human height in the 7th century, improved the vehicle's ability to move in difficult terrain. The 'intelligent armour' was extended by adding a second shield bearer to the team. The men replaced their long armoured shirts with shorter and more comfortable ones that reached only to the waist because the front and side screens of the cab were now strong enough to protect their lower bodies. By this very late stage of its development the chariot resembled to some extent a modern tank.

The new design enhanced the chariot's suitability for cross-country driving and defence against missiles, but no attempt was made to increase its offensive abilities: long-range strike power was still provided by a single archer. The chariot was now more expensive than ever and the price of just one vehicle must have been sufficient to equip dozens of bowmen fighting on foot instead. The Assyrian decision to maintain a force of at least hundreds of these costly weapons is a clear indication that the chariot must have been much more than a movable platform for a bowman. In fact, it should be seen as a weapon system in its own right: its huge, threatening appearance, the arrows shot by the archer, the speed of its approach, and its apparent invulnerability must have combined to shake the morale of an already wavering enemy.

Moreover, the chariot's improvements tell us something about contemporary infantry troops and their ways of fighting. Designed to survive the approach to the enemy lines under heavy defensive shooting, the chariot was perfectly suited to disperse enemy units that mainly consisted of bowmen, who were dangerous when fighting from a distance but helpless when caught in the melee. On the other hand, the whole concept of the Assyrian chariot was utterly useless against a Greek style phalanx of well-armoured spearmen fighting in close ranks. To approach such a foe the elaborate protection provided by the chariot was unnecessary, but at close range the vehicle and its crew would be in serious trouble. So even if the written sources provide no hints about the exact formation of the foot soldiers 'carrying spear and shield' in combat, the very existence of the Assyrian chariot and its continued improvements seem to exclude battle tactics comparable to those practised by the Greek hoplites in the 6th and 5th centuries BC. In the Near East during the Neo-Assyrian period, spearmen seem to have been of secondary importance. In battle they may have fulfilled a somewhat static, mainly defensive role. In scenes showing siege warfare they can be seen protecting archers with their shields, which hints at rather loose formations.

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The specialization of the chariot—its reduction to the single task of attacking under heavy barrages of arrows and stones—was due to the development of cavalry troops, which relieved it from former tasks requiring higher speed and mobility, such as reconnaissance and foraging. The 9th century was the experimental stage of the Assyrian cavalry, when its origins in the chariotry were still clearly visible. Two horsemen fought closely, side by side, one of them holding the reigns of both horses in order to allow the other one to use his bow with both hands. This was the minimum chariot crew of driver and archer, who had left their vehicle behind to ride on horseback instead. In the 8th century mounted archers learned to control their horses without additional help. Besides them we now find other horseback troops fighting with spears. They did not hold their weapons underarm, as in the couched lance style known from the European high Middle Ages, but are depicted thrusting them downwards like the Norman knights on the Bayeux Tapestry. In the 7th century, reliefs from Assurbanipal's palace show heavy cavalry with armour-clad horses. In spite of these developments, chariotry was never replaced by cavalry but they complemented each other, each concentrating on specific tasks of its own.

Assyrian civilization left no military treatises or manuals. Since the overwhelming majority of the military establishment most probably could not read or write, even in alphabetic Aramaic, such manuals would have been of little use anyhow. Unfortunately the main aim of royal propaganda, which provides us with the bulk of information on Assyria's ways of warfare, was to glorify the aftermath of battles already won. The pursuit of the defeated is celebrated, not combat itself. As a result, there are no pictures or reports on what happened in battle before victory had been achieved. For this reason, the course of not a single battle fought by the Assyrians can be reconstructed in any detail and we can only guess about the deployment of the different armed forces and their effects in combat. Ancient Near Eastern battle tactics may have been similar to those the English used to great success in several battles of the Hundred Years War and in the Wars of the Roses: a battle certainly began with hails of arrows exchanged by the masses of foot archers on both sides, who sent their missiles into the enemy formations in order to soften up their defences. At a certain point—perhaps when the enemy lines could be seen to waver or after some units had been already disrupted or forced to retreat by the relentless shooting—the chariots were sent in. Their charge decided the battle, putting the enemy to flight at last. The cavalry might have supported the chariots and the swift horsemen were certainly put to deadly effect when they hunted down the fleeing enemy. The ultimate, if rarely accomplished goal in every battle was not just to beat the enemy forces but to annihilate them completely.

Weapons and siege techniques

The considerable difficulties in capturing a well-defended city or fortress were due to the low technological standards of the time, which gave a clear advantage to the defender. The Assyrians used the most advanced techniques then known but they had by then

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already been in use for more than a thousand years. What is true for military technology in general goes for siege machinery too: the Assyrians invented no new principles or pieces of equipment. If possible, the Assyrians preferred to take cities by means of peaceful negotiations, by intimidation, or through ruse and treason. They tried to catch the defenders by surprise or to exploit disagreements among them. Only if all these 'cheaper' ways failed was the costly procedure of a siege proper to be ventured.

The main problem was the lack of any kind of artillery whatsoever, which could have destroyed fortress walls from a safe distance. Accordingly, nearly all siege activities had to take place within range of the defender's bowmen, and any direct approach required time-consuming preparations. Several methods were at the attacker's disposal: siege towers and siege mounds provided elevated positions for bowmen, allowing them to combat the defenders on the ramparts more effectively, thereby covering the approach to the fortifications on the ground. The walls could then either be left intact and surmounted by ladders, or they had to be breached. Breaching could be accomplished either by battering rams, protected by wheeled roofs against enemy missiles, or by use of tunnels and undermining (Figures 18.2a, 18.2b). A third but rarely used method was to dam up a huge reservoir of water, which was released in one big rush in order to wash away parts of the fortifications. In any case the final assault must have been a most bloody affair: coming to grips with a resolute defender via ladders could prove suicidal and the attempt to capture a breach would certainly result in a desperate melee. And afterwards, the fighting could well continue within the crooked and narrow streets so typical of ancient Near Eastern cities (Fuchs 2008: 53–59; Eph'al 2009).

However, the preconditions of such an assault were often not met at all. Mining required suitable soil conditions; siege towers, siege mounds, and battering rams were useful only if at least one part of the fortress was accessible via level terrain, and the chances of using water in the manner described above were even smaller. In most cases, there was no choice but to blockade the fortress until the defenders ran out of supplies. Some places, however, such as the Urartian mountain fortresses or the island cities of the Phoenician coast, were inaccessible as well as immune to blockade—they were impregnable in every respect.

The conduct of war—Assyria's dark side

Wars are terrible affairs and have always been, but in the ancient Near East the concept of war crimes as we now understand them was completely unknown. Moreover, people were convinced that their gods legitimized and approved the king's rule and his policies. Accordingly, the king's wars were wars of justice. Fighting against his gods' enemies, he was entitled to punish and mistreat them as criminals and sinners with unrestrained brutality. The Assyrian kings openly boasted of their atrocities and made a show of them. Collecting the severed heads of enemy soldiers killed in battle was a gruesome but yet comparatively harmless habit (Figure 18.3). Far worse, the soldiers also cut off the noses,

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(a)

(b)

FIGURE 18.2 (a) Armoured battering ram at work, with bowmen on a siege tower in the background: detail from panel 17 (top register) in the throne room (Room B) of Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Kalhu, modern Nimrud, Iraq, 9th century BC (British Museum, ME 124536). While the interest in accurately representing technical details is obvious in this instance, the king is shown in an idealized way, without any armour. (Photo by Karen Radner. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum) (b) An awkward depiction of another battering ram: detail of the top register of bronze band IX of Shalmaneser III's Balawat Gates, ancient Dur-Imgur-Enlil, Iraq (British Museum). In reality this weapon was probably similar to the one depicted in (a) above, but here it resembles a bloated crocodile on wheels: it seems as if the artist never saw or understood the workings of the device. (Reproduced from King 1915: pl. L)

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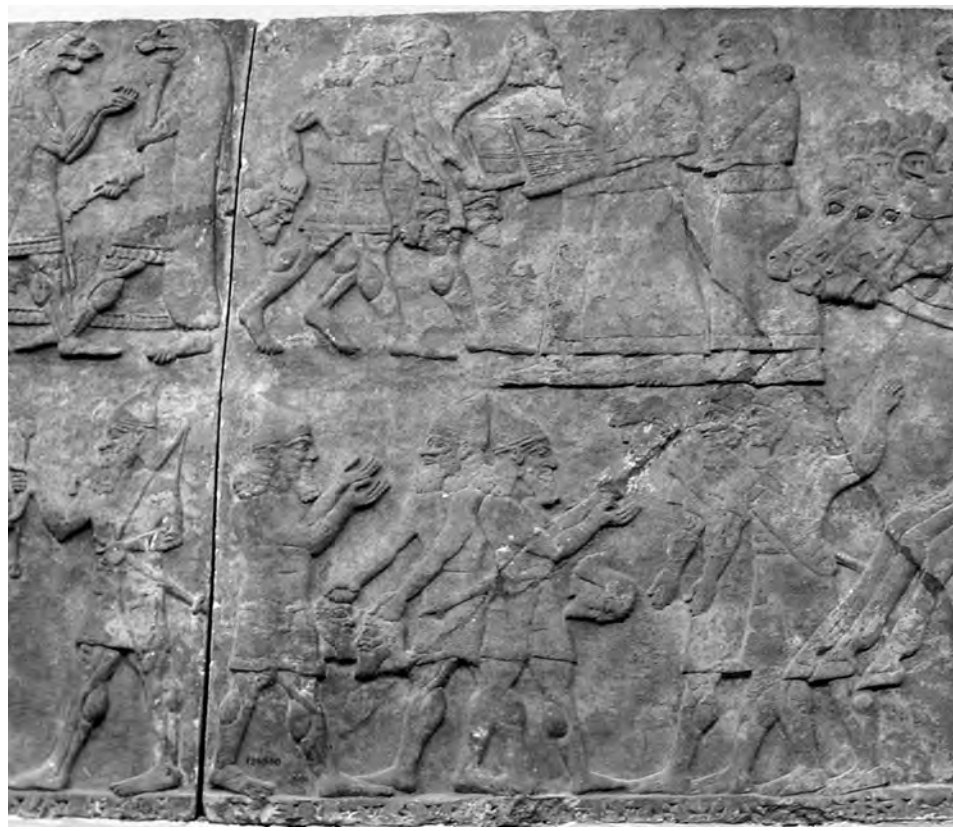

FIGURE 18.3 Assyrian soldiers celebrating victory, dancing with severed enemy heads and wearing lion costumes: detail of a stone relief from Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Kalhu, modern Nimrud, Iraq (British Museum, ME 124548). (Photo by E. Robson. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

lips, ears, hands, and feet of their victims when still alive, or they blinded, burned or beheaded them. The fate of captured rebels was especially harsh. They were paraded through the streets of several Assyrian cities and exhibited under humiliating conditions before they were impaled, disembowelled or skinned alive in public—the skins to be displayed on the city walls. Such atrocities were not restricted to the treatment of enemies alone. The Assyrians used the same methods to enforce discipline and obedience among their own troops, as the following order sent to a cavalry commander shows:

> This is a royal order of great emergency! Assemble the commanders and the horsemen of your cavalry unit immediately! Whoever is late will be impaled in the middle of his own house and his sons and his daughters too will be slaughtered, which will then be the fault of his own! Don't delay! Drop everything and come straight away! (Parpola 1987: no. 22, obv. 6–rev. 10; author's translation)

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At this point we might argue that the crimes and cruelties committed by the Assyrians were surpassed by later epochs of human history in every respect. And we might add that at least racism, religious persecution, and genocide were phenomena unknown to the Assyrians, but such friendly remarks are not enough to lighten the dark side of Assyrian warfare and power politics, which are revealed by the Assyrian sources with blunt naivety. To the countless victims of Assyrian expansionism these niceties would have been no consolation at all.

Conclusion

The Assyrian army, which had been developing since the end of the 10th century, was never beaten. It suffered temporary setbacks; it had to be used with caution; there were clear limits when fighting in difficult terrain; sieges were always a problem; and sometimes Assyria's only force was faced with too many different theatres of war at once. But of all the numerous and very different foes it encountered over the centuries not a single one ever managed to inflict a substantial defeat on her. In the end, the 'huge hosts of Aššur' met their doom fighting against themselves in the protracted power struggles following the demise of Assurbanipal in (probably) 631 BC. Already in 615 BC, when the up and coming Medes joined the Babylonian rebels, the Assyrian heartland was defended by a mere shadow of what had been the world's most formidable war machine for more than three centuries.

Further reading

An exhaustive and satisfactory study on the Assyrian ways of warfare is not yet available. Insights into the Assyrian army of the late 8th century are provided by Dalley (1985) as well as by Dalley and Postgate (1984). For a provincial contingent and the role of chariotry and cavalry see Postgate (2000). Several aspects of campaigning are discussed by Eph'al (1983). Assyrian siege warfare is examined by Eph'al (2009). For Assyrian archery see Zutterman (2003).

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CHAPTER 19

MANIPULATING THE GODS: LAMENTING IN CONTEXT

ANNE LÖHNERT

In the ancient Near East lamenting was inextricably connected with the idea of preserving and re-establishing the 'world order'—that is, to maintain a balance between the divine and the human spheres with the intention of guaranteeing the gods' benevolence towards humans. 'Positive' acts such as performing sacrifices or songs of praise were thought to result in divine favour, with 'positive' events such as victory in war being seen as a manifestation of the gods' support and protection of the community. Lamentation, on the other hand, draws our attention to the more unstable aspects of the divine–human relationship. Lamenting was motivated by, and sought to cope with, the primal and perpetual fear of divine abandonment; it was thus one of Mesopotamian society's most important means of direct interaction with the divine world.

The importance of lamenting is reflected by its distribution in time and space. Its earliest attestation is in a royal inscription of the 24th century BC, in which Irikagina, ruler of the southern Mesopotamian city-state of Lagaš, mourns the destruction of his temples by Lugalzagesi, enemy ruler of the neighbouring state of Umma. By the early second millennium, specific literary genres of lamentations emerged that became firmly integrated into everyday religious practice, and which survive in thousands of known manuscripts. The latest written witnesses to lamenting are two clay tablets dated to 84 or 81 BC, labelled as the property of the lamenter Bel-apla-iddin from Babylon (Reisner 1896: nos. 49, 55). In addition to compositions that we specifically term 'laments' (such as 'city laments' and laments for cultic or individual purposes) various other literary genres such as royal inscriptions, prayers, hymns, and myths could include passages of lamenting, making it one of the most characteristic and distinctive features of cuneiform literature. The geographical distribution of laments and compositions featuring lamenting covers the whole of what is nowadays Iraq as well as parts of Syria and Anatolia.

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Characterizing lamentations

In ancient Mesopotamia, an individual's mental, physical, and economic well-being was not a natural given fact nor was it achieved by personal ability. Instead, the gods granted a healthy and prosperous life by ensuring that one's actions succeeded, by preventing misfortune, and by protecting against hostile attacks. In short, if they were so inclined they were able to secure a permanent fate of peace and success (Löhnert and Zgoll 2009).

But Mesopotamian deities were characterized by their unpredictable behaviour. For example, Enlil, the head of the southern Mesopotamian pantheon until the mid-second millennium, is often portrayed in literature as fickle, arousing the flood meant to erase mankind simply because their noise annoyed him (see van Koppen in this volume). In general, human misconduct was thought likely to unleash divine wrath and end in personal or communal disaster. Lamenting provided a way of dealing with the fear of falling out of favour with the divine world. There are no Mesopotamian treatises on the impact of stress and trauma on the psychological and physical condition of human beings. But the fact that lamenting was practised in different contexts, including a professionalized environment in which cultic specialists performed dedicated compositions describing recurring themes of misery in a vividly poetic manner, shows an acute awareness of the dark side of human existence. It was the responsibility of communal institutions acting in the public interest to neutralize and overcome bad collective memory, uncertainties about the future, or negative conditions affecting the whole of society or an individual.

Though lamenting could also be incorporated into rituals, prayers, hymns, myths, and, less frequently, royal inscriptions, the art of lamenting is best documented in particular genres of literary compositions, often with a pronounced focus on the delicate relationship between humans and gods. The so-called 'city laments', dealing with the destruction and re-emergence of Mesopotamian cities, comprise a distinct genre of their own which we will discuss later in this chapter. Also, the so-called cultic laments used in the everyday cult share common features with, and may even display strong phraseological links to, the other genres.

It is difficult to identify an exact Mesopotamian counterpart to our abstract terms 'lament' or 'lamentation'. The closest correspondences are perhaps provided by the Sumerian literary terms *eršahuĝa* 'heart-soothing tears' and *eršemma* 'tears (accompanying) the kettle drum'. These designations are attested for a group of compositions which share several key features: language, content, textual structure, and association with a specific cultic functionary. These compositions are closely linked with other text groups, namely the *balaĝ* ('harp' or 'drum'; the nature of the instrument is still debated), the *šu'ila* ('hand-lifting', i.e. the gesture of praying), and the *širnamšub* ('incantation song'). All these compositions were written in a special sociolect called *emesal* 'refined language', which is distinguished from the Sumerian main dialect by phonology (that is, some words are different but the grammatical structure is the same) and by the fact that

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it is used exclusively in literary texts (Schretter 1990: 1–140). Its attested use was restricted to the direct speech of women and, by the 21st century BC if not earlier, to the cultic language used by the 'lamentation expert' (Sumerian *gala*, Akkadian *kalû*). The Emesal compositions originating in this professional environment constituted a key corpus of Mesopotamian cultic texts spanning two millennia, with the earliest group of manuscripts, about 400 tablets, dating to a 400-year period starting roughly at the turn of the third to the second millennium BC.

But while the modern label 'lamentation' implies an act of mourning this connection is not always obvious in the Mesopotamian compositions: there are, for example, *širnamšub* compositions that seem solely to celebrate the gods' cultic journeys. The key factor in assigning this body of texts to the lamentation expert was their function of calming and pleasing the gods, which did not necessarily need to take the shape of melancholic mourning.

We will now briefly outline the content and structure of the four most common types of laments: *balaĝs, eršemmas, eršahuĝas*, and *šu'ilas*. First, *balaĝs* consist of 100–1000 lines grouped into liturgical and thematic sections known as *kirugus*. Important elements in *balaĝs* are litanies, in which a deity is invoked and the destruction scenarios are illustrated. Second, *eršemmas* are short songs of a maximum of 100 lines which combine a brief mythological narration with a vision of the destruction of temples, often ending with praise to a deity. Old Babylonian *eršemmas* were always independent compositions but in the first millennium BC they could also form the concluding part of a *balaĝ* (Cohen 1981; 1988). Third, Old Babylonian *eršahuĝas* seem to have been individual prayers to a god that include a lament, a request for sympathy, and a call upon other deities to support the prayer. By the first millennium *eršahuĝas* were incorporated into the official state cult (Maul 1988). Fourth, the *šu'ilas* written in Emesal constitute a new genre not known prior to the first millennium BC. They consist of up to fifty lines, primarily comprising litanies addressing a deity and petitions to calm that deity's heart. At least two such compositions were sung during the New Year festival in order to ensure the safe entrance of the respective god (Marduk, Nabu, Aššur, or Anu) into his shrine (Linssen 2004: 197–200; Maul 1998). Only seven *šu'ila* compositions are known to date, although a catalogue from the library of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c*. 630 BC), which according to its colophon represents part of the textual repertoire mastered by the lamentation experts, lists forty-seven different *šu'ilas* (Maul 2005: 15 nn. 10–11, 102–108).

Apart from these laments, we need to introduce another important textual group, for which the modern term 'city laments' was coined. These compositions can be described as historical lamentations with infrequent use of Emesal. They deal with the destruction of a city caused by enemy invasion after the gods had abandoned the city; then, in a reversal of fortune, a king is seen as restoring the city and its temples whereupon the gods return, and the composition ends with a prayer or praise to the gods. City laments are politically and historically linked to the early second millennium, after the collapse of the state of the Third Dynasty of Ur, as the rulers of the subsequent First Dynasty of Isin appear as the restorers of the cities. The five known compositions deal with the destruction of the cities of Ur, Uruk, Eridu, and Nippur and, more expansively, Sumer

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and Ur (Green 1978; 1984; Michalowski 1989; Römer 2004; Tinney 1996); they are between 323 and 519 lines in length. Like *balaĝs*, they were divided into liturgical sections, but unlike *balaĝs, eršemmas, eršahuĝas*, and *šu'ilas*, the city laments were never integrated into the daily cult. Instead, they became part of the curricular repertoire of Old Babylonian scribal training. The latest known manuscript of a city lament, namely *The Lament over the Destruction of Ur* (BM 79966, unpublished), dates to the reign of Ammiṣaduqa of Babylon (1646–1626 BC) and the transmission of this genre seems to end around that time.

Private and communal lamenting

Lamentations can be divided into two groups with different objectives: private laments on the one hand and laments for the benefit of a community on the other (Krecher 1966; 1980–83). Prayers to personal deities and *eršahuĝas* can be assigned to the first category. But over time, the latter lost their private function and instead became laments for the benefit for the entire community. 'City laments', 'laments over the vanished deity' (mostly attested in myths), *balaĝs, širnamšubs*, and *eršemmas* are all communal laments. In the first millennium BC, a new genre emerged, the *šu'ila* 'hand-lifting (prayer)' in the Sumerian language, which needs to be distinguished from the *šu'ila* genre in Akkadian that is attested from the mid-second millennium BC onwards: only the Sumerian form can be considered a cultic lament according to the definition given above.

Up to and including the Old Babylonian period, we have almost no evidence for the social context of lamenting, whereas in the first millennium we find laments primarily embedded in the public environment, in the form of ritual descriptions or prescriptions and cultic calendars. Private lamenting on the other hand is attested in the Old Babylonian period in the form of literary letters to a god which often contain thoughts about divine punishment as a result of one's own wrongdoings (Hallo 1968); this point of view is increasingly elaborated in compositions from the mid-second and especially the first millennium BC, especially in Akkadian *šu'ila* prayers, in *šigû* compositions (prayers to ask forgiveness), and *diĝiršadiba* ('wrathful god') texts. With these prayers, an individual approaches the deity by means of praise before describing his or her misfortune and pleading for forgiveness for the misconduct that is thought to have caused the deity's desertion (Mayer 1976; Toorn 1985: 117–154; Zgoll 2003). This passage from a *šigû* prayer exemplifies the many personal laments attested in the first millennium BC:

> Badness has deprived me of my pleasant mood, my health is carried away, my good looks have been disfigured, my good Genius and my good Fortune stand aloof from me, my family has left my sight, I lie prostrated in the sorrowful place of mourning! Friends and comrades are continually annoyed with me, my fellow citizens are continually annoyed with me! I transgressed the borderlines of the god, and (now) I suffer oppression! (Toorn 1985: 141–145, ll. 17'–22').

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While on a communal level abandonment by the gods resulted in the downfall of a city or the whole country, on a private level the gods' desertion was thought to lead to the physical, mental, and social decline of the individual. And whereas the cultic laments were meant to prevent communal catastrophes, the many private prayers aim at reversing the catastrophe before it was too late: the turning away of a god was felt on a personal level like an illness that had to be cured. The prayers close with an expression of hope for recovery and a promise to spread the god's praise:

> Make me enter the temple Esangila (i.e. Marduk's temple in Babylon), the temple of the gods, the house of life! Entrust me for my good and friendly hands to merciful Marduk! I want to praise your greatness! I want to extol your divine power! Let my fellow citizens proclaim your valour! Let the people praise you before the gods! (Toorn 1985: 141–145, rev. 29–33).

Such prayers do not necessarily belong to the official cult but they, too, were usually performed by a professional, the 'exorcist' (Akkadian *āšipu*, on whose work see Schwemer in this volume). In the following, we will focus on lamenting on behalf of a community and its practitioners, the professional lamentation experts (Sumerian *gala*, Akkadian *kalû*; see also Tanret in this volume).

Professional lamenters

Lamentations can be traced over almost two millennia—a time span equalling that of the Bible's transmission. During that time, some compositions became extinct while others were meticulously copied or rearranged. The majority of the laments were composed in Emesal, the 'refined language' that from the beginning of the second millennium BC had a purely cultic character, but a few were also translated into Akkadian (Gabbay and Wasserman 2005).

Thanks to the extensive information available from ritual prescriptions, descriptions, and colophons, the cultic setting of the Emesal lamentations can be reasonably well established for the first millennium BC (Linssen 2004: 184–320), as can the identification of the scribes and singers who composed, copied, and performed them (Löhnert 2008: 427–435). Less evidence is available for the Old Babylonian Emesal lamentations, but it is clear that professional lamenting was already then the domain of the *gala* or *kalû*. For instance, the colophon of an Old Babylonian *eršemma* mentions a certain Uduga, 'son of the chief lamentation expert' (Bruschweiler 1990: 120, 122, rev. 31). Some cultic lamentations state that these professionals were responsible not only for singing the laments but also for the 'calming of the heart' of the deity, the supplication, and the appeal for sympathy known as *ahulap*.

The later ubiquitous connection between the lamenter and the *balaĝ* instrument is evident as early as the 22nd century BC (Löhnert 2009: 11–12), while lamentation experts themselves are attested from *c.* 2500 BC when they participated in funerary rituals

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together with 'old women' (dam ab-ba), who were presumably (semi-)professional mourners. The fact that Emesal served both as the language of women in literary texts and as the language of the lamentation experts and the fact that old women seem to occupy an important role in funerary rites and wailing ceremonies, as depicted, for example, in *The Cursing of Agade* (Cooper 1983; ETCSL 2.1.5; see below), has led to the assumption that at some point women's mourning was transformed into a proper profession (Cooper 2006). The motif of the mourning woman as the prototype of the lamenter is also reflected in the figure of the 'wailing goddess', frequently attested in the lamentations.

The lamentation expert is the only cultic functionary who used the 'refined language' associated with women, despite the fact that men usually held this profession. This is connected to a long-standing discussion about the gender and sexual orientation of lamentation experts. Some scholars have argued that they may have been eunuchs or homosexuals, while others point out that there are families and dynasties of lamentation experts (Cooper 2006: 44; Gabbay 2008; Tanret in this volume; Ziegler in this volume).

How to become a lamentation expert

One of the essential components of a scribal education until the first millennium BC was training in the Sumerian language. But although students were routinely introduced to literary compositions such as hymns and epics, there was often only marginal training in Emesal, if any at all. In the Old Babylonian period, the language was taught at an advanced level by means of the 'city laments', although these can have provided only an introduction to the understanding of more complex Emesal compositions. But a few surviving school tablets prove that Emesal lamentations were also taught on a level of professional specialization (Löhnert 2008: 436–437).

In the first millennium BC, however, we have no indication whatsoever that Emesal was routinely taught to trainee scribes. Rather, it was relegated to the specialized training reserved for advanced students who were specifically destined for a career in the service of the gods. From the Neo-Babylonian to the Arsacid period (*c.* 600–80 BC), colophons of single-column tablets mention the scribe of the text as 'novice lamentation apprentice' (*šamalli kalê agašgû*, on a tablet from Ur containing forty-three lines of excerpts from seven *balaĝs*), 'lamentation apprentice' (*šamalli kalê*) or 'young lamentation expert' (*galaturru ṣehru, kalû ṣehru*) (for references see Hunger 1968: index *s.v. galaturru* and *kalû*; Cavigneaux 1993: 254). All of these designations refer to the early stages of the professional lamenter's career.

A Late Babylonian tablet from Babylon, whose obverse contains an extract of fifteen lines from a *balaĝ* and whose reverse has an extract from a lexical list (van Dijk 1987: no. 34), provokes the question of whether Emesal always belonged to an advanced stage of scribal education. For lexical lists were generally taught in the students' first years of training, following the basic training in writing cuneiform signs. Does this tablet bear

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witness to a student who was already preparing for a career in lamenting, early in his scribal education? As most schooling took place in private settings, we can safely assume that the teacher was free to configure the curriculum to fit the individual student's needs.

According to the colophons it was common practice that tablets written by a 'young lamentation expert' became the property of his father, himself a lamenter. As is the case with most Mesopotamian professions, lamentation experts were usually sons following their fathers' professional footsteps (Gesche 2000: 215–216). But it remains unclear whether the father would have taught his son from the very beginning or only when the more advanced and specialized levels of training were reached; of course, this may have differed from case to case.

The oral aspects of the teaching process remain largely hidden but can be demonstrated by 'unorthographic' spellings. These can be explained as listening mistakes which led to misunderstandings. One trainee scribe, for example, transformed the phrase 'Its shepherd plays the mourning reed' to 'Its shepherd plays in the back' by mistaking ge ir$_2$-ra for egir-ra (Löhnert 2009: 335, 338, l. 19).

A handful of Old Babylonian colophons include the phrase 'words of PN' (inim PN) at the end of lamentations, which seems to be parallel to the note 'checked by PN' (igi-kar$_2$ PN), where PN is the fully trained person under whose supervision the scribe of the tablet wrote down the text. In at least one instance it is a 'chief lamentation expert' (*gala-mah*) whose words had been written down. We can safely assume that it was always a lamenter who dictated the words for the trainee to write: due to the highly specialized Emesal knowledge required it is hard to imagine anyone but the lamentations experts themselves acting as teachers (Löhnert 2009: 69–74).

But we should not presume that a student would write down a text of hundreds of lines without a template. The attested tablet formats show great variety and range from small rectangular tablets of 9–35 lines, measuring about 10 × 6 cm, to huge tablets of more than 550 lines arranged in five columns on each side, measuring 25 × 30 cm. The small tablets may have served as aids for students to memorize a composition, while tablets that have been left blank except for a few lines of text on the obverse may be interpreted as the teacher's draft that the student had to copy. Many first-millennium manuscripts are one-column tablets some 10 × 20–25 cm in size, roughly the length of a forearm. This could indicate that they rested in the crook of the lamenter's elbow as an aide-memoire during performance (Black 1991; Löhnert 2009: 30–36).

Generally, we are not aware of any type of exam that would have served as an official certification admitting the trainee lamenter to the profession. It is likely that the student, having memorized key compositions and become acquainted with their cultic context, would have accompanied his teacher, who more often than not would also have been his father, during a lamentation performance. This hypothesis is perhaps best argued on the basis of a manuscript which the 'young lamentation expert' Anu-belšunu from Uruk wrote down in 231 BC, recording ritual instructions for a lamenter during a temple restoration ceremony (Linssen 2004: 293–298). It would seem extremely likely that he not only copied these instructions but also participated actively in the ritual. In this way, the

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trainee lamenter would gradually become an expert himself who eventually would pass on his knowledge to the next generation.

Dealing with loss, preventing loss: Lamenting on behalf of the community

The well-being or success of a community was irrevocably connected with the gods' beneficence. In the following section, we will investigate the role of lamenting in dealing with the effects of war and the place of lamentations in the official cult.

Lamenting the effects of war

Military victories were attributed to divine favour, while defeats were considered to be caused by—and to cause—divine abandonment. Throughout the millennia royal inscriptions, epics, cultic laments, and other literary texts shed light on the perspective both of victors and defeated. Although the information is unevenly distributed, it is clear that the concept of divine abandonment inextricably combined explanations on several different levels (e.g. Beaulieu 2001 for the goddess Ištar of Uruk in the first millennium BC). For instance, an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar I, a 12th-century king of Babylon, retrospectively accounts for the god Marduk's disappearance:

> At that time, in the reign of a previous king, portents changed, the good departed, evil was constant. The lord (Marduk) became furious and wrath was in his heart. He commanded, and the land was abandoned by its gods. The mind of its people changed, they were incited to treachery. The guardians of peace became angry and ascended to heaven's dome, the protective spirit of justice stood aside. The god…who guards life abandoned the people. They all became like those who have no gods. (Frame 1995: B.2.4.8, ll. 15–20)

The incident in question had happened in the 14th century BC when Babylonia was invaded by Elamite troops. Babylonia's lost political independence was restored only after Nebuchadnezzar brought Marduk back to Babylon from Elam, a feat for which he was still being celebrated centuries later. Here, the god's departure and the country's downfall are presented on a purely theological level, ignoring events such as pillaging and plundering of temples and culminating in the abduction of the statues of Marduk and other gods.

A similar event is reported almost 1200 years before Nebuchadnezzar's time in an inscription of Irikagina, ruler of the southern Mesopotamian city-state of Lagaš. He is the only ruler in Mesopotamian history to report the destruction of divine property in his own realm, relating how Lugalzagesi, ruler of neighbouring enemy state Umma, destroyed the temples of Lagaš and ruined the divine statues. By destroying their temples, Lugalzagesi alienated the gods from their homes. By defiling the gods' statues, he

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did not simply destroy mere works of art but violated the gods themselves, whose presence was manifested in those statues.

> He set fire to the temple of the goddess Gatumdug, he snatched its precious metal and lapis lazuli! He destroyed its images! He set fire to the temple oval of the temple Eanna of the goddess Inana, he snatched its precious metal and lapis lazuli! He destroyed its images!…In Sagub, he plundered the temple of the goddess Amageština! From Amageština he snatched the precious metal and lapis lazuli! He threw (the image) into the well!' (after Frayne 2008: E1.9.9.5, iii 13–iv 10, vi 11–vii 6)

A combination of theological explanation and description of real events is given in an epic in honour of Tukulti-Ninurta I, king of Assyria (r. 1243–1207 BC). It celebrates his victory over Babylonia, whose king, Kaštiliašu IV, had broken an oath and thus caused the gods' wrath:

> Marduk abandoned his sublime sanctuary, the city [Babylon],
> He cursed his favourite city Kar-[…].
> Sin left Ur, [his] holy place […],
> Š[amaš became angry] with Sippar and Larsa,
> Ea […] Eridu, the house of wisdom […,]
> Ištaran became furious w[ith Der…],
> Annunitu would not approach Akkad […],
> The lady of Uruk cast [off her…]:
> (All) the gods were enraged […] (Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, i 38'–46': Foster 2005: 301)

The divine abandonment allowed the Assyrian invasion: the epic goes on to describe how Tukulti-Ninurta raided Babylonia, plundered its temples and loaded their riches on boats to bring them before the Assyrian god Aššur and to furnish Assyrian temples.

Mesopotamian history rarely saw periods of peace, and the enumeration of destructions caused by war and invasion could be easily continued. Victory is but one side of the coin. What was the reaction of those who lost? A key goal was to attract the gods' sympathy, to make them return and provide a new beginning for the community. *The Cursing of Agade* is a literary composition linking the arrogant behaviour of Naram-Sin, king of Akkad (Agade; r. 2254–2218 BC), to the destruction of his kingdom and its capital at the hands of the Elamites. It describes the reactions of the surviving inhabitants after part of the populace had been slaughtered and the survivors were close to starvation:

> The old women who survived those days, the old men who survived those days and the chief lamentation singer who survived those years set up seven *balaĝ* harps/drums, as if they stood at the horizon, and together with *ub, meze*, and *lilis* drums made them resound to Enlil like Iškur for seven days and seven nights. The old women did not restrain the cry 'Alas for my city!' The old men did not restrain the cry 'Alas for its people!' The lamentation singer did not restrain the cry 'Alas for the Ekur!' Its young women did not restrain from tearing their hair. Its young men did not restrain from sharpening their knives. (ETCSL 2.1.5, ll. 196–206)

This passage shows the entire people lamenting, an act which touched the god Enlil. He himself started to fast, also an act of mourning. The composition is unusual in granting

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the lamentation no lasting effect on the gods. Instead, Akkad is once more abandoned by the gods and destroyed forever, and the lament closes with the statement: 'Akkad is destroyed—hail the goddess Inana!'

Such disastrous events were clearly kept in the collective memory (Wilcke 2000). At the end of the 21st century BC Ibbi-Suen, last king of the Third Dynasty of Ur, was taken captive and abducted to Elam, resulting in the collapse of his kingdom. Several of the so-called 'city laments' deal with these traumatizing historical events. The scenes of destruction describe not only how the urban inhabitants of the Ur III state suffered but also that the city goddesses mourned their ruined temples. The city, the goddess and the anonymous performer of the lament address the gods Enlil and Anu, whose words caused the 'storm' and the 'flood' of the catastrophe. Thus we read in *The Uruk Lament*:

> Like a swelling flood, like…, Subir poured into Sumer. They…like stampeding goats, they tore apart the corpses of the population. They mutilated Sumer and Akkad, they pulverised it as with a pestle. They destroyed its settlements and habitations, they razed them to ruin mounds. The best of Sumer they scattered like dust, they heaped up.…They massacred its populace, they finished off young and old alike. They destroyed the city of the Anuna gods, they set it aflame. They put out both Uruk's eyes, they uprooted its young shoots. (ETCSL 2.2.5, E 65–72)

And in *The Nippur Lament*, the goddess (or the city) exclaims: 'My heart is dark, I am destroyed, I am in chaos, I have been devastated!' (ETCSL 2.2.4, l. 137). In contrast to *The Cursing of Agade*, the people are supported by the goddess, leading to a reversal of fate for the previously forsaken cities. Another lament relates the goddess's emotional distress when the enemy abducted her, in the form of a conversation between the lamenter and the goddess. The text as a whole is known from an Old Babylonian tablet with no assignment to one of the 'city laments'; in the first millennium it was part of at least two *balaĝs* (Gabbay 2007). Here, the goddess describes her panic:

> When he reached out his unclean hands,
> when [he said?]: 'Get up, board [the ship]!',
> when the property [had been boarded on the] bow,
> me, the lady, had boarded the stern,
> when I was stricken by its…terror,
> the foe entered (with) his feet in sandals my chamber,
> the foe reached his unclean hands towards me!
> He reached his hands out, he frightened me, I was in agony!
> The foe reached his hands out, he subjugated me to fear! (Römer 1983: ll. 11–19)

The lament then relates how the goddess was deprived of her belongings: the enemy stripped her of her robe and gave it to his wife, cut off her gems and gave them to his child.

Unfortunately, we have no information about the context in which the 'city laments' or *The Cursing of Agade* were performed but these compositions are very clearly concerned with topics that affect the entire community rather than just an individual person. An event like the destruction of Akkad or the cities of the Ur III empire certainly

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called for laments. Certainly, such events prompted a general public to participate in lamenting—to channel their own fear, to affirm their responsibility towards the deities, but also to remind the deities in turn of their responsibility toward the human world. Generally speaking, the 'city laments' were means by which a collective disastrous event could be memorialized, whereas the function of the cultic laments was to prevent a catastrophe before it happened.

In *The Cursing of Agade*, the act of lamentation is explicitly directed at the god Enlil. Laments in general show that, according to the Mesopotamian view, deities had feelings. Times of chaos necessitated interaction between the human and divine world, not only to reassure and heal mankind but also to soothe the angered hearts of the gods. In fact, the calming of the gods' hearts through lamentation was an essential feature of Mesopotamian religious practice and not restricted to the terrors of war. In the following passage from an *eršemma* the goddess Gula complains about the failure to perform laments for her, a practice she appears to consider as important as the work of the cultic priest: 'My lamentation expert no longer cools down my heart! My *gudu*-priest no longer sings jubilations!' (after Cohen 1981: 103–105: 23–24).

Lamenting in cult

Cultic laments were regularly performed on occasions which could potentially harm a deity's abode or image: during building work on a temple, repairs to a divine statue, and the mouth-washing ritual which made a new divine statue come alive; whenever a deity left the temple—for instance, to participate in a procession or cult voyage; any time excavations or maintenance work was carried out on a canal; and whenever a solar or lunar eclipse portended future evil. Consider the following passage:

> (The temple:) Its towering brickwork is now crouching like a mother in mourning,
> Its reed mats are convulsing like a person in colic.
> Its reed eaves lay on the ground like torn out hair.
> Its door wings disappear like bats flying into the ruin mound.
> Its doorframes are borne down like a person who is constantly thrown to the ground.
> The great door is loosened from the hinge of the rightful house.
> The rightful house's bar and bolt are groaning!
> The rightful house, whose name has become a woe, is moaning.
> …
> Its (i.e. the city's) lord no longer dwells in there—raging he drove to the netherworld,
> Its lady no longer dwells in there—raging she drove with him to the netherworld.
> The fox drags its tail there,
> The francolin shrieks out from there! (Löhnert 2009: 266–272: 15–26, 327–331: 26–29)

Here, we are not witnessing the destruction of war but a procession leading the god Enlil from Nippur to the city of Isin, around 30 km away, and then back to his home. The passage is part of a *balaĝ*, with an attested history from the Old Babylonian periods down to

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the 2nd century BC, over a millennium and a half after Isin had lost its importance in southern Babylonia.

272 of the composition's lines are preserved (with an unknown number of lines missing). It starts with a long section in which Enlil as a merchant—the archetypical traveller—is prompted to leave his temple and city in order to go to Isin. The text then turns into the lament of a goddess who mourns her losses. The last preserved part of the composition again calls Enlil a merchant who has turned away from his city and left it to ruin, but ends nevertheless with: 'Father Mullil (i.e., Enlil), step outside in your city! It has been fixed on the beautiful tablet (of destinies)!' (Löhnert 2009: 356–359: 34´).

This *balaĝ* exhibits features common to many cultic laments. It works with metaphors and similes which present the world turned upside down in the wake of Enlil's departure: the description of the collapsed temple and its architectural decorations is the opposite of its appearance in peaceful times when it reaches up to heaven. The city's (divine) rulers have left for the netherworld, while steppe animals, represented by the fox and the francolin, have taken over the city, the final stage of abandonment. The lamenting goddess is the only one left behind, crying over what has been lost. This intense description of loss and ruin cannot be taken literally but as an apocalyptic scenario that would come about should the travelling god not return, leaving the goddess behind as a defenceless woman. And the human populace would be left behind with her.

Our *balaĝ* reveals another typical feature of lamentations, the separation of literal and practical levels. An exclusively literal approach to a lament's content can be misleading, as emerges from a ritual description from Old Babylonian Mari (Ziegler 2007: 55–63). This ritual of the goddess Eštar, performed periodically at a fixed date in the year, included feeding the goddess, performing sporting activities, and singing parts of the *balaĝ* composition uru$_2$ am$_3$-ma-ir-ra-bi ('This city which has been pillaged'; Volk 1989). Judging from the title of this popular composition, with its long history of transmission until late in the first millennium BC, one could assume that it concerns the destruction of a city, of which there is no evidence in the Mari ritual at all. The individual liturgical sections (*kirugu*) of which longer lamentations, including the *balaĝ* uru$_2$ am$_3$-ma-ir-ra-bi, were composed could differ greatly in their content and tone. Used individually, as in the ritual of the goddess Eštar in Mari, these sections were used to structure ritual performance according to liturgical demands and mark, for instance, a change of speaker, scenery, atmosphere, or ritual action.

Unfortunately, ritual descriptions that provide information on the occasions that called for the performance of lamentations are rare before the first millennium BC. However, administrative documents from the Ur III period allow us to reconstruct the cultic calendar of the 21st century BC to some extent (Sallaberger 1993) and provide us with an idea of how cultic laments may have matched the religious festivities attested in the administrative records (see also Brunke in this volume). Contexts for the performance of lamentations include instances of the gods' leaving their temples during agricultural ceremonies and royal visits, the gods' bathing rites, mourning rituals on the occasion of the death of rulers, priests, priestesses, and other respected individuals, and ceremonies at the time of the new moon. All these occasions bore an inherent risk that

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the gods would leave and not return—for instance, because a divine statue might become lost or damaged during a procession or the sun or moon might not become visible again after an eclipse—and thereby endanger or upset the existing world order.

By the first millennium BC, cultic laments amounted to a corpus numbering thousands of manuscripts. During the performance of just one ritual event many different laments could be sung. We are especially well informed about the laments performed by lamentation experts at the spring festivals in the city of Assur, which are recorded in three first-millennium manuscripts (Maul 2000). During the three months of festivities, no fewer than forty *balaĝs* and their matching *eršemmas*, six *šu'ilas*, one *eršahuĝa* and another unclassified lament were performed. They each accompanied highly ritualized actions which saw the gods being awakened, seated upon thrones, prepared to receive visiting deities, and leaving and entering their temples. The constant lamenting over the course of about ninety days was to calm the gods during these important and potentially dangerous events; it reminded the gods of their importance for the community but also highlighted the delicate nature of each of these activities, which might have resulted in divine outrage if they went wrong.

First-millennium lamentations were not only sung on special occasions like the New Year festival but constituted part of the everyday cult, with calendars tabling the performance of specific *balaĝs* and *eršemmas* on specific days throughout the year (Maul 1998; 2000). While these compositions had been created in earlier periods for a variety of specific purposes they had now become detached from their original function: the lamentation experts had established standardized editions of the majority of Emesal lamentations, which they performed as routine elements of daily cultic practice with the intent to avoid divine anger.

Conclusion

The importance of lamenting is evident not only through its wide geographical and chronological diffusion, as attested in numerous cuneiform manuscripts, but also through the broad range of economic, political, and personal hazards that the compositions were designed to overcome. By consigning lamenting to professional practitioners and transforming the act of mourning into a ritual activity which was tied to the temple cult, Mesopotamian society found an effective way to channel and harness its fears. Lamentation experts used a special language, Emesal, to communicate with the gods and gain their favour. Even though most people would not have been able to understand the laments, their presence at the performance of laments, for example during divine processions, further enhanced the ritual act.

The rich textual witnesses of cuneiform culture demonstrate an awareness over more than two millennia that deities might turn away from their communities or the individual at any moment. But at the same time, they portray the gods as closely connected to, and involved with, mankind. Lamenting served to remind the gods of their ongoing responsibilities towards their creation.

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Further reading

Krecher (1966) and (1980–1983) provide an insightful overview the different types of laments and their transmission history. Cohen (1981) is a compilation of *eršemma* laments; he subsequently published *balaĝs*, primarily from the first millennium BC, in transliteration and translation (Cohen 1988). Further editions of *balaĝs* are found in Krecher (1966), Volk (1989), and Löhnert (2009), and of *ersahuĝas* in Maul (1988): all these works also provide literary and social analyses of these compositions. For the 'city laments' see the editions by Green (1978; 1984), Michalowski (1989), Römer (2004), and Tinney (1996), as well as ETCSL §2.2.

While Black (1991) and Wilcke (2000) position lamenting in its wider religious and social context, van der Toorn (1985) presents a stimulating discussion of the relationship between lamenting and 'sin'. The cultic context of selected laments is the subject of Maul (1998; 2000). Löhnert (2009) investigates the education and training of lamenters. Finally, on the characteristics of the Emesal sociolect see Schretter (1990).

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CHAPTER 20

MAGIC RITUALS: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND PERFORMANCE

DANIEL SCHWEMER

We might provisionally accept that magical activity consists of symbolic gestures, usually accompanied by recitations, performed by an expert who is reliant on transmitted knowledge, with the goal of effecting an immediate change and transformation in the object of the activity. If so, then a glance at the large body of cuneiform texts that have survived from three millennia of Mesopotamian history leads us to an extensive group of Sumerian and Akkadian texts that Babylonians and Assyrians regarded as falling within the competence of an expert called in Akkadian *āšipu* or *mašmaššu* (conventionally translated 'exorcist'). An investigation of the technical literature associated with this profession, the corpus of *āšipūtu* (perhaps also *mašmaššūtu*?) 'the exorcist's lore', and of other texts of various genres that provide information on the activities of these scholars and practitioners will lead us to various institutions and segments of Mesopotamian society: to the temple, the palace, to libraries, private households, to the streets of the city and into villages, to the courtroom and the sickbed. We will encounter other professionals whose remit is related to, or overlaps with, that of the exorcist, such as the 'physician' (*asû*) or the 'snake-charmer' (*mušlahhu*); we will also meet more elusive figures like witches, ghosts, deities, and demons. In many respects the texts that are introduced on the following pages will match our provisional notions about magic, but a number of aspects will take us into the spheres of religion and (premodern) science and reveal the limited applicability of our traditional compartmentalizations.

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'Magic' and other (unavoidable) misnomers

Ancient Greek authors used the term *mágos*, a direct loan from Old Persian *maguš*, not only as a designation for Iranian experts in religious matters but also as a pejorative term for ritualists whose practices, in the authors' view, lacked piety. Derived from *mágos*, the ubiquitous term *mageía* soon carried the same polemical connotation as a derogatory label for ritualistic activities that were thus characterized as obscure, irrational, and impious. Ultimately, in this line of argument, *mageía* is a powerful deception performed by shrewd practitioners on their immature, credulous victims, and it is no surprise that the term usually refers 'to the activity of the Others' (Braarvig 1999: 51).

This range of connotations still accords with the most important semantic facets of the term 'magic' in modern usage. More importantly, based on its use in Greek sources, magic not only came to function as a key category of religious self-demarcation (by missionaries with regard to non-Christian beliefs and practices and so on), but it also became, especially in anthropology and the history of religions, one of the three main paradigms for describing and classifying the interaction of humans with their environment. To this day the triad of magic, science, and religion provides a powerful heuristic framework for organizing the study of past and contemporary cultures. Science is supposedly concerned with rational, empirically based human endeavour which produces objective, verifiable knowledge, while the sphere of religion encompasses all phenomena associated with the worship of the divine. Magic, however, is the wayward child of science and religion, combining the latter's credulous engagement with the supernatural with the former's belief in the unlimited power of human actions. An early elaboration of this trichotomy can be found in the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* (5th–4th century BC; ed. Grensemann 1968; trans. Lloyd 1984: 237–251; Braarvig 1999: 37–40), but its most influential exposition was formulated by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1922 [1996]: 58–72).

This approach has been criticized ever since, and scholars of magic in particular have argued that the term 'magic', intrinsically tied to its pejorative connotations and numerous misconceptions, should be avoided altogether or, at least, be reserved for practices that were regarded with disdain within the culture under study. But while the critical reaction against the Frazerian trichotomy has highlighted the inadequacy of each of the three concepts and has drawn attention to their inherent value judgments and the consequent scholarly misunderstandings, it has not provided heuristic instruments that could match the associative power, cultural translatability, and productive imprecision of 'magic', 'science', and 'religion'. The resulting dilemma is neatly summed up thus: 'One problem is that you cannot talk about magic without using the term magic' (Versnel 1991: 181).

Against this background it makes little sense to start a survey of magical practices in ancient Mesopotamia with a detailed and narrow definition of what we understand

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magic to be. Rather, we should approach the extant sources bearing in mind a general notion of our own concept of magic, which then can be modified by the study of the sources themselves, leading towards an adequate understanding of what can be subsumed under the heading 'Mesopotamian magic'.

Figures like witches, ghosts, deities, and demons all formed part of the world inhabited by the Mesopotamian people, and, for all we know, the existence of these beings was never questioned by any Babylonian or Assyrian scholar. Therefore one could argue that the ideas and stereotypes associated with them should be characterized as common knowledge rather than beliefs, because 'belief', from a modern perspective, implies choice (Robson 2008: 463). But while the reality of witches, ghosts, deities, and demons was never questioned, the people of the ancient Near East were well aware of the out of the ordinary and elusive nature these beings.

The average Babylonian or Assyrian did not live in constant fear of evil witches; only specific situations of crisis were interpreted as witchcraft-induced and could sometimes even lead to accusations against concrete persons. The ghosts of one's family lived in the distant netherworld, and would regularly be provided with funerary offerings; again it was *extraordinary* circumstances that indicated that a ghost haunted a house or had taken hold of an individual. Demons dwelt in the netherworld or drifted through the wilderness and the mountains. Amulets offered protection against their potential attack; but we do not get the impression that fear of demons normally hindered people from going about their daily business. Mesopotamian people hoped that their personal protective deities constantly accompanied them, while proper induction and care made sure that the gods dwelt in their temples and were present in their cult images to guarantee the welfare of the land. At the same time the gods evidently lived at an insurmountable distance in their cosmic locations, and experience taught that a deity, powerful as it was, would usually be difficult to offend.

This outlook is, of course, never expressed in the pious rhetoric of hymns and prayers. But the Hittite *Instructions to Temple Personnel* have to argue against a widespread attitude among the temple herdsmen who trust that they can appropriate livestock because the deity obviously does not care:

> [Wh]y do you snatch [the food] from the god's mouth and take it [away] for yourselves or give it to another person [saying] thus: 'Since it is a god, he will say nothing and he will do nothing to us!'?—Just look at the man who whisks away your desired food from (before your) eyes!—But when later on it acts, the will of the gods is strong. It does not make haste to seize, but at whatever time it seizes, it will never let go again. (Schwemer 2009b: 99).

Mesopotamian herdsmen certainly shared the views of their Hittite colleagues and had to be reminded that a god's inaction must not be misinterpreted as ignorance.

In short, while a Mesopotamian person's relationship to the more elusive personal figures of his or her world is dissimilar to our concept of belief because the fact of their existence was not a matter of choice, it shares its lack of immediacy and the situation-dependent variability of its intensity.

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Tablets and libraries, students and scholars, practitioners and patients

At some time in the mid-7th century BC, a young man called Kiṣir-Nabu, scion of a well-established family of exorcists affiliated to the god Aššur's temple in the city of Assur, copied a difficult cuneiform text that contained, according to its heading, the 'titles of the series of the exorcist's lore (*āšipūtu*) which have been established for instruction and study, a complete list'. He filled line after line with the complex Sumerian logograms that referred to the various groups and genres of *āšipūtu*-texts and carefully added Akkadian explanations, alternative titles, and phonetic readings of logograms in a smaller script between the lines and on the margins of the tablet. The text, dubbed the Exorcist's Manual by modern scholarship, was copied by young *āšipu* scholars everywhere in first-millennium Mesopotamia. Manuscripts have been found not only in Assur but also at Nineveh, Sippar, Babylon, and Uruk (Geller 2000: 242–254; Jean 2006: 62–72). Other evidence for a 'series' of *āšipūtu*, a fixed sequence of tablets that comprises all the works listed in the Exorcist's Manual, is still lacking. In any case the scribes certainly did not copy the Exorcist's Manual as an actual catalogue of their libraries; rather it functioned as a canon that defined the range of knowledge an *āšipu* had to master. The list of works, many of which are at least partially preserved in the surviving written record, is impressively long, especially if we bear in mind that most of the single titles refer to multi-tablet series or large text groups.

The list begins with compositions associated with the temple cult, including rituals for the foundation of a temple, the induction of cult images ('washing of the mouth') and the installation of priests (ll. 2–3). This is followed by Sumerian incantations addressed to the sun-god, Akkadian 'lifting-of-the-hand' prayers, and rituals for appeasing an angry deity (l. 4). It continues with rites for individual months and specific ceremonies pertaining to kingship, probably rituals performed by and on behalf of the king (l. 5). Next come four extensive diagnostic and prognostic series (l. 6), then compendia with mainly Sumerian incantations against demons (l. 7). The following lines list general purification ('wiping') rites and a group of interrelated compendia of Sumerian incantations against various illnesses, evils, and demons (ll. 8–10). The purification rituals *Bīt Rimki* ('Bath-house') and *Bīt Mēseri* ('House of confinement') are named together with 'washing of the mouth' rites (l. 11). Lines 12–14 are mainly devoted to various ritual series against witchcraft and curses. The list continues with measures against evil-portending dreams, rituals against impotency, and texts pertaining to pregnancy, childbirth, and infants (ll. 14–15). The next section (ll. 16–18) lists rituals and incantations against diseases affecting specific body parts, against nose-bleeds, vomiting, and diarrhoea, followed by incantations against snake bite, scorpion sting, and the *sāmānu* ('redness') disease (l. 19). Measures for the protection of a man's house, especially against epidemics, are followed by rituals to ensure the acceptance of offerings (l. 20). After ceremonies pertaining to settlements, houses, fields, gardens, and canals come rituals against storm damage and field pests (ll. 21–22). Then

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the list records rituals that promise protection on travels and on campaign, followed by purification ceremonies for cattle pen, sheep-fold, and horse stables (ll. 23–24). Finally, rituals for favourable omens and oracles are mentioned, and at the end of the long list stand pharmacological texts pertaining to plants and stones as well as instructions on how to arrange such drugs on strings to form amulets (ll. 25–6).

As if this formidable list was not enough to demonstrate the wide range of knowledge an *āšipu* had to acquire, the text continues in a second part with yet another sequence of rituals and prescriptions (ll. 28–40). And though tradition had it that the lore of the *āšipu* as a whole originated with Enki/Ea, the god of wisdom and magic, the arrangement of this second set of texts in this comprehensive canon was ascribed to the 11th century scholar Esangila-kin-apli (Lambert 1962: 68–69; Finkel 1988: 150; Beaulieu 2007: 477; differently Jean 2006: 62–82). Esangila-kin-apli's list comprises rituals against evil-portending omens, extra-canonical incantations, prescriptions for medicines against a wide range of ailments (including various forms of paralysis and fits, fever, disorders caused by gods, ghosts, demons, or humans), and gynaecological texts. Having mastered all this the student was to devote himself to bilingual texts and texts written in the Emesal variant of Sumerian (see Löhnert in this volume); then he should learn to research Sumerian and Akkadian rituals and, finally, he should study the great omen compendia.

The tablet assemblages recovered from the libraries of Mesopotamian scholars show that writing new tablets was an important element of an exorcist's training. The student either copied the text from an older tablet or demonstrated his knowledge by writing out incantations and rituals from memory. His teacher, usually his father or uncle, would then check and correct the tablet—Kiṣir-Nabu's copy of the Exorcist's Manual has the note KÚR, which probably means 'wrong!' in the margin (rev. 41). The new manuscript would then be added to the family's library (see, e.g., Hunger 1976: 13 with n. 17). One Marduk-šapik-zeri, a Babylonian scholar, recommends his own and the services of twenty of his colleagues in a long letter to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC) by detailing their qualifications and enumerating the texts that he himself had studied during his professional career (Parpola 1993: no. 160).

But the fact that many of the compositions listed in the Exorcist's Manual have survived is not only due to scribal training. Many colophons note that a tablet was copied for a performance; sometimes even information on the ritual client is provided: 'I made (it) on the 24th of Ṭebetu (Month X) for Šamaš-šumu-ukin, king of Babylon' (Lutz 1919: no. 120, rev. 15–17). From about the same time, in the mid-7th century, a letter from Marduk-šakin-šumi, chief exorcist to the Assyrian court, illustrates how the scholars had to write tablets in preparation for a performance:

> Concerning the ritual about which the king (Esarhaddon) said yesterday: 'Get it done by the 24th day'—we cannot make it; the tablets are too numerous, (god only knows) when they will be written. (Parpola 1993: no. 255, obv. 5–10).

Characteristically the two passages just quoted both refer to royal patients. The scholars whose libraries let us glimpse the practice of *āšipūtu* in first-millennium Mesopotamia were all members of the urban elite and held high offices at local temples or the royal

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court, and their patients usually belonged to, or were associated with, the same social stratum. The *āšipu*, however, was not the only expert who cured the ill by means of ritual and incantation. Other professionals, such as the snake-charmer, the *eššebû*-'owlman' (Stol 1999: 668–669), and the *qadištu*-woman, offered their services in the streets of cities and villages. But since these practitioners had no part in the written tradition, their activities are known mainly through distorted characterizations in the incantations of *āšipūtu*.

The Exorcist's Manual presents the ideal range of knowledge an *āšipu* should acquire according to standards established in the late second millennium BC. It neither describes the historical development of incantation literature nor expounds changes in the *āšipu's* professional profile over time. It provides even less information on the competence and interests of individual exorcists and their families. A survey of the remains of *āšipus*' libraries, such as Kiṣir-Nabu's (Pedersén 1986: 41–76) or the libraries of Anu-ikṣur and Iqiša at Uruk (Hunger 1976: 11–13; Weiher 1998: 21; Robson in this volume), shows that the tablets written and collected by these scholars were not restricted to their profession's lore. They include texts that traditionally belong to the lore of the physician (*asû*) and a wide range of other scholarly genres.

The *asû*'s remit was apparently concerned originally with ailments whose cause was evident (like heat stroke, external injuries, fractures, common coughs and sneezes). He would set bones, perform (hit and miss) surgery, and employ medications whose preparation and application could include the recitation of incantations. The ideal subdivision of the art of healing into *āšipūtu*, the lore of the exorcist, and *asûtu*, the lore of the physician, deeply influenced the organization and transmission of Babylonian magical and medical texts. It is visible in many prescriptions which refer to the knowledge of both crafts as the two basic strategies for fighting illness. But a closer look at the structure of individual rituals and therapies, a survey of the tablet collections of these experts and, last but not least, letters written by them demonstrate not only that these two strategies were regarded as complementary, but that the actual competence of an individual expert was not necessarily defined by the traditional and ideal profile of his profession (see Schwemer 2007a: 188–191 with further references).

Rituals, remedies, and recitations: The tools of the trade

An *āšipūtu*-ritual consisted of manual and oral actions performed by the ritual client or by the exorcist himself, sometimes in lieu of the client. Outside a temple context the *āšipu* and the patient were usually the only participants in the ritual (Figure 20.1). The procedures were fixed and followed the instructions of the given ritual text, whose wording, if not part of a recitation, could vary in its phrasing and level of detail. This variation between individual manuscripts can be difficult to distinguish from variants that resulted from substantive changes to the actual ritual proceedings.

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FIGURE 20.1 Modern impression of a Neo-Assyrian seal, 9th–8th century BC (serpentine, 2.9 × 1.27 cm): an exorcist treats a patient in a reed hut or under a canopy (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, lent by Tono Eitel, 1994 (L.1994.10)). (Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Texts to be declaimed during the performance included prayers and incantations as well as short addresses, whose wording was fixed in writing. The prayers and incantations formed part of the literary tradition, and most texts were transmitted in a more or less stable form from the late second millennium onwards, when many compositions of *āšipūtu* had been brought into a form that was regarded as authoritative by later scholars. First-millennium incantations can often be analysed as the product of a production process in which traditional motifs and phrases were recombined and existing texts skilfully extended (Abusch 1987: 13–44; Farber 1990b). In some cases comparison of the variants between individual manuscripts or of different versions of a composition as it changed over time, lets us glimpse the oral traditions which predated, or coexisted, with the texts that are preserved (Farber 1989: 148–160; 1990a). Only occasionally did rituals allow for free prayer: '(the patient) speaks out (before the deity) everything that worries him' (e.g. Pinches 1891: no. 55/2, obv. 20).

The arrangement of instructions and spoken parts within the ritual text was not uniform. Sumerian incantations were not always accompanied by separate ritual instructions. Either their ritual setting was standardized and did not need to be spelled out or the instructions were incorporated into the wording of the incantation as actions performed by Enki himself or, more commonly, stylized as Enki's advice to his son, the divine exorcist Asalluhi. Akkadian texts provide separate ritual instructions which either

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integrate the full text of the recitations in the appropriate place or quote the relevant prayer or incantation by its first line, referring the reader to a separate section of the tablet or, in the case of extensive rituals, a separate tablet. Standard incantations that all exorcists knew by heart were usually not written out.

Sumerian incantations in their classical form follow a set of well-defined types (Falkenstein 1931). Some address the forces of evil directly and introduce the exorcist as authorized by Enki; others were recited over specific ritual materials whose potency was invoked and thereby activated. The commonest first describes in general terms the evil forces and the trouble they cause, then relates their attack on the patient, and concludes with Enki's advice to Asalluhi on how to heal the patient. The Akkadian recitations, which were all designated as *šiptu* 'incantation', included: (a) prayers calling upon a deity or a group of gods; (b) spells invoking a—frequently deified—substance used in the ritual (for these two groups, see Mayer 1976); (c) incantations focusing primarily on the ritual actions performed by the speaker; and (d) incantations addressing the forces of evil directly. The last especially were often introduced by a mythological image or a short narrative section (*historiola*). Most recitations, whether Sumerian or Akkadian, refer to their goal—the purification of the patient, the banishment of the evil—not by claims of achievement, but as wish, often with analogical spells:

> I have washed myself over her (that is, [a figurine representing] the witch), I bathe over her with water. I am returning the dirt to her—let her receive it! Just as the water runs off my body and flows over her, let any evil that is present in my body, my flesh (and) my veins, run off like the water of my body and depart from my body for good! (Akkadian prayer to Šamaš, Læssøe 1955: 40, ll. 51–55).

Besides Sumerian and Akkadian incantations, spells in foreign languages were used, as well as 'abracadabra' texts that cannot be assigned to any language, though some of them may represent garbled Sumerian, Hurrian, or Elamite (Dijk 1987).

The place and time of the performance were specified in the ritual instructions, and hemerologies (ominous calendars) or oracles could be consulted to determine the appropriate day. Some days were auspicious for specific types of rituals—for instance, the day of the new moon for anti-witchcraft rituals (Schwemer 2009d: 62–63).

The symbolic actions carried out during *āšipūtu*-rituals are too varied and numerous to be summarized in a few sentences. Important elements included: (a) offerings for specific deities arranged on and around a portable altar, a censer, and a libation vessel (Maul 1994: 48–59; cf. Scurlock 2006: 512); (b) purification rites such as washing and donning a clean garment; (c) rites that symbolized the transfer of impurity and evil onto materials that could be eliminated or substitutes that could be permanently removed; and (d) preventative measures, such as amulets, apotropaic figurines, fumigations, and medicine pouches.

Finally, a wide variety of drugs for remedies in the form of salves, potions, washes, fumigants, suppositories, etc. could be used (probably by both *asû* and *āšipu*) to fight the same illnesses against which the *āšipu* would perform ceremonial rituals (see Böck in this volume). As both letters and prescriptions show, these two strategies would often be com-

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bined, the remedy soothing the symptoms, the ritual removing the ultimate cause of the illness (e.g. Cole and Machinist 1998: no. 66; Köcher 1963–80: no. 482, iii 7–8). But some texts indicate that remedies were employed only after the ritual had failed to obtain its goal: there are prescriptions for illnesses 'which the *āšipu* is not able to remove' and similar. The choice of therapeutic strategy also depended on the specific disease pattern and diagnosis (cf. Farber 1980–83: 445a; Maul 2004; Scurlock 2006: 78–83; Schwemer 2007a: 188–192).

Liminal magic: Induction and transformation rituals

In the domain of the cult—myths, of course, tell a different tale—the divine sphere was set apart by the fact that it lacked all imperfections of the human world. The gods were perfect, undisturbed immortal beings, and since the key purpose of the cult was to provide appropriately for the gods (thereby ensuring their contentment and goodwill), anyone and anything that entered this sphere had to conform to their standards. This not only demanded general intactness and the absence of any abnormality but also a clean and neat condition. As in many cultures, these standards converged in a complex concept of purity that stipulated the protection of the gods' dwellings—the temples with their shrines—from any defilement. Before people and objects were allowed access to this realm, they had to undergo scrutiny and specific purification rites, among them the so-called 'washing of the mouth'. (For the induction of temple personnel, see Borger 1973; Farber and Farber 2003; Waerzeggers and Jursa 2008; a prime example of the induction of cult objects is the kettledrum ritual, see Linssen 2004: 92–100, 252–282).

The problem of proper induction into the divine sphere posed itself most acutely in the case of cult images. Artefacts made by human craftsmen had to be transformed into a visible manifestation of the deity itself. This transformation was achieved through the performance of the two-day *Mīs Pî* ('Mouth-washing') ritual that is attested in two first-millennium versions, but whose origins reach back into the third millennium (Walker and Dick 2001; Berlejung 1998). The ritual, replete with Sumerian incantations, began on the morning of the first day with the preparation of the holy water. Reed huts for the gods were set up in an orchard near a river, from which water was drawn and brought into the temple of the purification-god Kusu (Michalowski 1993: 158–159). There the usual purifying substances were added to the water that had been decanted into a holy water vessel (Maul 1994: 41–46). The temple workshop was purified, and the mouth-washing and mouth-opening rite performed for the first time on the new cult image, which was then led in procession to the orchard together with the craftsmen and their tools. On the river bank offerings were made to Ea and Asalluhi, and some of the tools thrown into the river. In the orchard offerings were made to the great gods, the gods of purification, and the divine craftsmen. After repeated mouth-washing and mouth-opening, the cult image was set up in a reed hut for the night, looking towards sunrise. The next morning saw more offerings and recitations, and again the rite of mouth-wash-

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ing and mouth-opening was performed repeatedly on the new cult statue. Then—a typical element of induction rituals—the statue's destiny was whispered into its ears: 'From today may your destiny be considered as divine' (Walker and Dick 2001: 50, 65: Nineveh version, l. 167). Now the journey of the new cult image to its home could begin. The craftsmen took oaths that not they but Ea's divine craftsmen had manufactured the statue; the oath was reinforced by symbolically cutting off the craftsmen's hands with a knife of tamarisk wood. Finally the cult image was led into the temple and enthroned in its shrine where the mouth-washing rite was performed one last time. Step by step the human artefact was thus transformed into a pure, living, and divine representation of the deity.

Defensive magic: Dispelling the evil, protecting the patient

Most rituals performed by Mesopotamian exorcists were defensive in nature. The successful ritual removed a specific evil which had affected or threatened a person or their house and protected against future aggressions of this kind. Most commonly the presence of such an evil manifested itself in calamity and illness in the widest sense. The expert determined the nature of the evil that had befallen his client through inspection of his symptoms and his situation in life; in doubt an oracle could be consulted. The main causes of illness and agents of evil were: (a) demons, (b) curses that resulted from the transgression of a taboo or contact with tabooed substances; (c) witchcraft performed by fellow humans; (d) angry deities; and (e) ghosts. Though interconnected in many ways, this categorization played a formative role in the organization of the *āšipu*'s lore and can serve as a guide through the vast corpus of rituals and incantations.

Demons

Demons were envisaged as low-ranking, often monstrous creatures of the divine sphere that roamed the wilderness and mountains (associated in some sources with the netherworld) and became dangerous on their raids into human habitations. They flew with the wind, slipped into the house through the window; doors and bolts were no obstacle to them. Lamaštu was a lion-headed creature with donkey's ears, dog's teeth, and the claws of an eagle. She especially attacked infants and women before, during, and after childbirth. Rituals against Lamaštu include preventative measures, such as the destruction or removal of figurines representing Lamaštu, amulets showing Lamaštu, and, if an attack had already happened, various remedies, especially against fever. A group of amulets depicts Lamaštu being driven off by the demon Pazuzu as she crosses the Ulaya river, surrounded by her provisions, to return to the 'steppe' (Figure 20.2).

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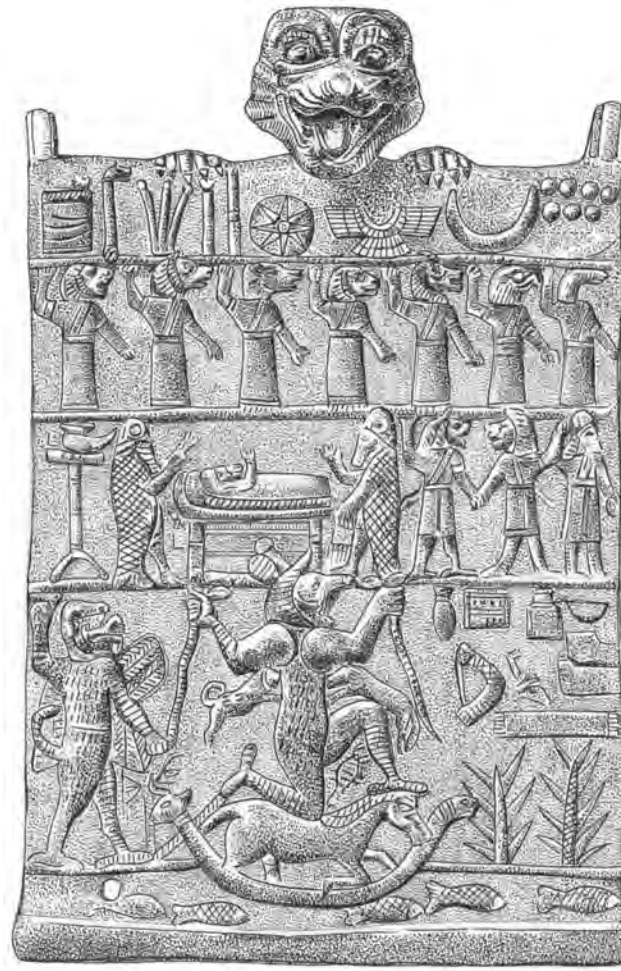

FIGURE 20.2 Neo-Assyrian bronze amulet against the demon Lamaštu (13.3 × 8.4 × 2.5 cm; Collection de Clercq, now in the Louvre). The third register shows a sick man being treated by fish-garbed protective spirits associated with the god Ea (*apkallus*), with apotropaic demons guarding the entrance to his bedroom. The fourth register depicts Lamaštu crossing the Ulaya river; she is chased away by the demon Pazuzu, and her ritual paraphernalia and provisions are detailed on the right side of the amulet (Farber 1987c; Wiggermann 2000: 243–248). (Drawing by C. Wolff)

The distinction between 'magic' incantations against demons and 'medical' incantations against (personified) illnesses sometimes becomes rather blurred. For instance, *sāmānu* ('redness'), described by incantations as a monster coming from the mountains, crossing the river, and attacking humans and animals alike, caused various ailments that were accompanied by abnormal redness, such as inflammation and bleeding (Finkel 1998). Incantations for curing dog bite, scorpion sting, and snake bite were very common, notably in earlier periods (Finkel 1999), and often demonized these animals,

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which, like demons, lived in the wilderness but invaded human habitations (Veldhuis 1993: 167–168).

Curse and divine wrath

The Exorcist's Manual names rituals for undoing witchcraft (uš$_{11}$-búr-ru-da) and for undoing a curse (nam-érim-búr-ru-da) side by side, as it did for *Maqlû* ('Burning') and *Šurpu* ('Incineration'), the extensive rituals against witchcraft and curse respectively. That this arrangement is not random is indicated by the fact that a number of rituals and recipes were regarded as effective against both *kišpū* 'witchcraft' and *māmītu* 'curse'; there also seems to be a certain complementary distribution between the symptoms that indicated witchcraft or curses as the cause of an illness (Schwemer 2007a: 66, 195–196). The rationale underlying this pairing is nowhere explained explicitly, but it seems significant that both evils originated in human actions. In the case of *māmītu* it was the patient or members of his family (living or deceased) who had transgressed a taboo; in the case of *kišpū* it was fellow humans who practised sorcery against the patient. Both ritual types also share a common technique that aims to completely annihilate the causes of the patient's sorrows: the burning of materials representing the evil. The performance of *Šurpu* included the burning of dough that was applied to and wiped off the patient's body. The patient himself would throw various items representing his crimes into the fire, among them garlic peelings. The accompanying incantation explains the ritual action:

> Just as this garlic is peeled and thrown into the fire,
> (just as) the fire-god, the burner, consumes (it),
> (just as) it will not be cultivated in a plant-bed,
> (just as) it will not be reached by (the water of) ditch and canal,
> (just as) its roots will not take hold of the soil,
> (just as) its shoot will not sprout and see the sun-god,
> (just as) it will not come near the meal of god or the king,
> (so) may (broken) oath, curse, *(the attempted) invalidation (of a curse)*, (divine) interrogation (regarding my crimes),
> my illness, my weariness, my guilt, my crime, my sin, my transgression,
> the illness that is present in my body, my flesh (and) my veins,
> be peeled off like this garlic so that
> the fire-god, the burner, consumes (it) today!
> May the curse leave so that I may see the light!
> (*Šurpu* V–VI, 60–72, see Reiner 1958: 31)

Other *Šurpu* incantations give long enumerations of the possible transgressions that may have caused the patient's sorrows. The lists include ordinary crimes such as murder, theft, perjury, and witchcraft, but also less tangible wrong-doing like arrogance against gods or humans and mere contact with an accursed person or substances touched by such a person. In many ways related to *Šurpu* and other rituals for undoing *māmītu*,

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there are also prayers and rituals designed to appease a deity's anger caused by the patient's wrong-doing (Lambert 1974).

Ghosts

A deceased father and mother could not only inflict harm on the living by misdeeds during their lifetime that incited the gods' anger, they could also come back as ghosts and haunt their offspring, especially if they had not regularly received their funerary offerings. The exorcist had a variety of rituals and remedies at his disposal whose purpose was to send such ghosts back to the netherworld and heal the sufferings they had caused. The ghost of father and mother received friendly treatment. The exorcist prepared figurines representing them, which were decorated and fed with hot soup, a typical provision for the dead. On the day of the funerary offerings their fate was decided before Šamaš. Then the figurines were placed in a sailing boat, together with their provisions, and sent off (Köcher 1963–80: no. 323, ll. 79–88; Scurlock 2006: 537–538).

Evil ghosts of other people that pursued the patient were not always treated that kindly. They usually received libations; figurines of them were buried and thereby banished to the netherworld. One ritual involves four figurines of clay representing the ghosts which are pursuing the patient and a figurine of wax representing the illness inflicted by the ghosts. The latter is melted, while the ghost figurines are buried in the patient's family tomb. The molten wax is poured through miniature offering pipes held by the ghost figurines, thereby transferring the illness to the netherworld and feeding the ghosts the evil that they had inflicted on the patient (Scurlock 2006: 197–199; Schwemer 2009a).

Common to most anti-ghost rituals is the idea that the exorcist puts the ghost under oath not to return; at the end of an anti-witchcraft ritual during which figurines of warlock and witch are sent to the netherworld together with a ghost, the latter is addressed thus:

> [Befo]re Šamaš, the judge, yo[u have] rec[eiv]ed *a gift*, [a pre]sent has been given to you. [The dis]play, fit for the netherworld, has been arranged for you. [Figurines of] my [wa]rlock and witch I have entrusted to you [befo]re Šamaš. Take (them) with you [t]o the Land of No Return, do [n]ot release them! You are adjured [by] Šamaš, your constant escort, you are adjured [by the Igigi], the upper gods, you are adjured [by the Anunnakk]u, the lower gods… [If you re]lease [th]e[m], (you will be cursed)! (Köcher 1963–80: no. 332, iv 5′–17′)

Evil signs and prophylactic measures

If a healthy person heard the cry of a ghost in his house it portended death for that person's family, and there are a number of rituals that are designed to avert such evil before it actually struck. Pre-emptive ritual measures against misfortune heralded by specific events that indicated a bad fate for the client were quite common in Mesopotamian magic. They are based on a dualistic concept of fate that distinguishes the eternal,

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unchanging destinies that rule human life from the changeable, and therefore flexible fate of the individual. A large body of texts labelled nam-búr-bi 'its release' served this purpose (Maul 1994). The rituals have two principal goals: on the one hand the evil sign as such—for instance, a monstrous birth—has to be physically removed; on the other hand Šamaš as the divine judge is implored with offerings and prayers to revise the evil fate that has been ordained for the patient. Other rituals could be employed if bad dreams portended evil (Butler 1998), and even royal war rituals are stylized as defensive rituals against evil omens (Mayer 1988; Schwemer 2007b). If a solar eclipse portended the worst for the king (the sun of his people) a substitute king could be installed for the time of danger, while the king was addressed as 'farmer' and underwent extensive purification rites. The performance of this ritual is best documented in letters from the Neo-Assyrian period (Kümmel 1967: 169–187; Parpola 1970–83: xxii–xxxii), which also show that the unfortunate substitute on the throne did not usually survive the ritual. However, an otherwise uncorroborated anecdote reports that a gardener in Old Babylonian Isin stayed on the throne after the real king had died from sipping broth that was too hot (Grayson 1975: 155).

Pre-emptive measures did not have to wait for a bad omen indicating imminent danger. Amulets (sometimes in the form of cuneiform tablets), necklaces, and figurines could always be used to protect houses and persons. They were employed particularly in situations of heightened vulnerability, such as pregnancy and childbirth (Stol 2000: 49–52), but also during events such as the foundation of a new house.

Aggressive magic: Gaining attractiveness, power, and success

The art of the exorcist was not restricted to dispelling an evil that had befallen or threatened to befall the patient. Besides the large group of defensive rituals, the *āšipu*'s lore also comprised several types of aggressive rituals whose performance was intended to give the client power over others. A man could force a woman into loving him; a woman could equip herself with irresistible charms (Biggs 1987–90; Wilcke 1985; Scurlock 1989–90; Schwemer 2007a: 159–160). Even an innkeeper who suffered from slow business could be helped by means of a ritual to attract punters to his tavern (Farber 1987b: 277–281; Maul 1992). There were rituals for calming the anger of one's adversary and for strengthening oneself before going to the palace or appearing in court; there were also methods to ritually gag one's opponent before confronting him in court (Schwemer 2007a: 127–130, 159–160). The relevant Sumerian rubrics include ka-dab-bé-da 'seizing the mouth', é-gal-ku$_4$-ra 'entering the palace', šúr-hun-gá 'soothing the anger', šu-du$_8$-a 'holding back', igi-bi-húl-la 'delighting his face', and di-ku$_5$-gub-ba 'standing before the judge'. A runaway slave could be forced to return by the performance of a ritual. The pertinent incantations use the image of the turning door that swings out but ultimately stays in its place:

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> You are the bedroom door which is firmly put in place, I have set your foundations in place with oil and with beer. Just as you swing out from your position but turn to come back into your position, let PN, the runaway slave, make his round but turn to come back to his masters' house! (Ebeling and Köcher 1953: no. 135, obv. 11–16).

Examples of all the ritual types mentioned so far are attested on cuneiform tablets from Mesopotamian libraries, but lists of ritual types—such as can be found in the Exorcist's Almanac, which indicates favourable times for the performance of certain rituals—suggest that other aggressive rituals were also known. There was once, for instance, a ritual for removing someone from office and one for depriving someone of the king's favour (Schwemer 2007a: 160; cf. Scurlock 2005–06).

The aggressive rituals occupy a peculiar place in the *āšipu*'s lore. Tablets with instructions for their performance were found in the libraries of these scholars; they studied and certainly used them if required. On the other hand, lists of various methods of (prohibited) witchcraft can include some of these aggressive rituals (Schwemer 2007a: 67), and the Exorcist's Manual omits them all. It may be significant that the extensive remains of the royal libraries of Nineveh, whose collections primarily housed texts that were necessary for the protection of the king's person, have not yet produced a single fragment of a ritual of this type. Did the king's scholars regard these texts as dubious, or were these rituals merely irrelevant for someone in the king's all-powerful position? Whatever the case, there can be little doubt that the aggressive rituals were regarded with a certain ambivalence, a grey area between approved *āšipūtu* and proscribed witchcraft.

Witchcraft: The dark side of magic

The principle that ritual acts, prayers and incantations, food and drink, drugs and ointments can be used not only for a person's benefit but also with intent to harm is common to all cultures that accept the effectiveness of symbolic acts. Mesopotamia was no exception: Babylonians and Assyrians considered witchcraft to be one possible cause of illness and mishap. While all witchcraft-induced sufferings could be referred to by the single term *qāt amēlūti* 'hand-of-men'(-disease), various sets of symptoms could be diagnosed as witchcraft-induced: stomach problems, lung diseases, impotency, emotional problems, mental disorders, as well as complex, serious diseases that caused severe pain, paralysis, and a rapid deterioration in the patient's health. Nevertheless the diagnosis was not arbitrary; signal symptoms, such as excessive salivating or bleeding from the mouth, were regarded as typical of witchcraft-induced ailments. The variety of symptomologies corresponds to numerous witchcraft diagnoses, among which one can distinguish two main groups: (a) bewitchment caused by the performance of evil rituals, often involving the manipulation of figurines representing the patient; and (b) bewitchment caused by contact with bewitched substances.

With the notable exception of a pierced figurine (Schwemer 2007a: 209–214) the available sources are restricted to the written record. Law collections from all periods ban witchcraft (*kišpū*) as illegal and impose capital punishment on the perpetrators. A

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few letters and legal documents provide evidence for witchcraft accusations and trials. But significantly the main evidence comes from the texts used for diagnosing and treating witchcraft-induced illnesses, including ceremonial rituals as well as prescriptions for the preparation of medicines. Rituals and remedies were the normal response to witchcraft suspicions; only in exceptional circumstances were legal proceedings initiated and actual people brought to trial as alleged witches.

At the centre of the concept of witchcraft stands the image of warlock and witch. The way these agents of evil were perceived is illustrated by incantations, which reveal a pattern of imaginings regularly associated with them. The elements that characterize the sorcerer and sorceress include their undetermined identity and their identification with foreigners and with certain professions, especially socially low-ranking practitioners like the snake-charmer or the *eššebû*-owlman. In the witch's case there were also associations with exclusively female cultic offices that enjoyed a special status set apart from the male world.

Although in principle both male and female individuals were accused of being the agent of witchcraft, the image of the witch was by no means gender-neutral. The witch, *kaššāptu*, was primarily female and frequently addressed alone, whereas her partner, the male *kaššāpu*, existed only at her side. On the other hand, there was a primarily male agent of witchcraft, called *bēl dabābi* 'opponent in court', 'adversary'. His position was complementary to that of the female *kaššāptu* and—just as the male *kaššāpu* is not mentioned except when paired with his female counterpart—the female enemy (*bēlet dabābi*) occurs only at the side of her male partner.

The texts describe the evil activities of the sorcerers at great length: they bewitch the patient, chase, seize, destroy him. They scheme evil, they are angry, slander their victim before gods and men. They bind him, sully him, and cause all kinds of ailments. They transfer their sorceries to the victim with food, drink, bath-water, and ointments, and recite their evil spell against the patient. They fashion figurines representing the patient, dirty them, pierce them, burn and dissolve them in different ways, bury them in different places to symbolize the victim's death.

The basic pattern of an anti-witchcraft ritual consists of a simple transition: the victim is transferred back from a state of imminent death to life. He is purified and his bound state undone, while sorcerer and sorceress are made to meet the fate they had intended for their victim by the sending back of their witchcraft onto them. This basic pattern means that anti-witchcraft rituals often comprised mirror-image performances of the rituals that the sorcerers had supposedly carried out against the patient, except that the patient claimed to have his ritual performed in public while the sorcerers had acted secretly. The switching of the patient's and the sorcerers' fate was interpreted as a legal process, usually before the sun-god, that ended with the acquittal of the innocent patient whose unjustified verdict had been provoked by the sorcerers' slander.

The most extensive Babylonian anti-witchcraft ritual was called *Maqlû* 'Burning' (Abusch and Schwemer 2008; and see Figure 20.3). It began after sunset by invoking the stars, the astral manifestations of the gods. The patient allied himself with the gods of the netherworld, whom he asked to imprison his witches, and with the gods of heaven, who would purify him. The exorcist drew a magic circle to protect the crucible, which played

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a central role in the following proceedings, and the whole cosmos was asked to pause and support the patient's cause (Schwemer 2010). This was followed by a long series of burning rites during which figurines representing the warlock and witch were burned in the crucible. The following passage is taken from one of the incantations recited at this stage of the ritual:

> Pure oven, great daughter of Anu,
> inside whom the fire of the grave is flaring,
> inside whom the valiant fire-god has taken up residence,
> [whose] flames have reached the sky [...],
> burn, set alight, incinerate my witch!
> May my warlock's and witch's life swiftly, quickly come to an end! (*Maqlû* II, 219–224)

After the sorcerers' death by fire had thus been enacted repeatedly, a figurine of the witch's personal fate-goddess was defiled by pouring a black liquid over its head. By this act the witch's evil fate, her death, was sealed (Schwemer 2007a: 226–228; 2009c). In the second half of the night destructive rites directed against the evildoers were gradually superseded by purification and protection of the patient. Incantations greeted the rising sun-god as the patient's saviour, and the ritual ended with the patient identifying himself with his own reflection in a bowl of pure water shimmering in the morning light:

> You are my reflection...You are mine, and I am yours. May nobody know you, may no evil approach you! (*Maqlû* VIII, 127–137, Schwemer 2007a: 228–230).

Success, failure, and the 'magical experience'

Counter-intuitive events, such as serious illness and premature death, demand counter-intuitive yet plausible causes (Boyer 1994). Within the ancient Mesopotamian world demons, witches, angry deities, or one's own transgressions were regarded as such extraordinary causes, whose identification enabled the expert to appropriately and rationally react to the patient's situation. As to this day, the healer's art could not guarantee success. Exorcist and physician regarded certain syndromes or certain stages of a disease as beyond their power, and the desperation of those beyond any help is reflected in letters and wisdom literature (Parpola 1993: no. 187; Schwemer 2007a: 151). Some therapeutic texts give alternative instructions in case the first treatment did not improve the patient's condition, and it is likely that false diagnoses or the insuperable power of a demon or a god were often blamed for failure.

Of course pre-emptive rituals are often effective by definition, and the self-limiting nature of many diseases ensured that an *āšipu*'s rituals and remedies had a certain success even with those already affected by illness. Moreover, the herbal and mineral drugs that were used in the treatment of the patient would show certain effects, and the

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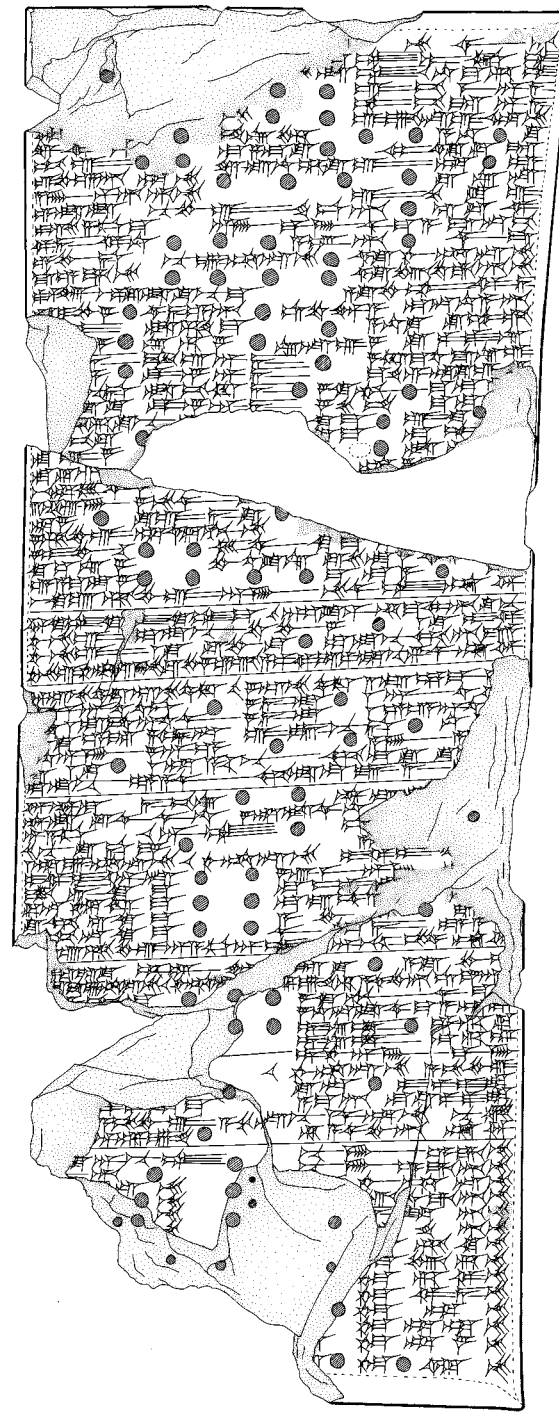

FIGURE 20.3 Neo-Assyrian manuscript of the ritual *Maqlû*, tablet I, 7th century BC: from the library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh (British Museum, K 43 + 142 + 2601 + Sm 1433 obverse). (Drawing by D. Schwemer; publication by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)

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suggestive power of the rituals performed within their own cultural context, within the world of the 'magical experience' (Glucklich 1997), must not be underestimated. And even if the objectively observable symptoms remained or worsened, the interpretation of the illness by the patient and his environment would often have changed. The condition which had indicated an attack of evil powers or a dramatic alienation from the gods and had presented an unsettling and unlimited threat was transformed by the performance of the ritual into a normal illness, into a situation one could cope with. Where the modern bystander would observe the foreseeable failure of a superstitious endeavour, to the Mesopotamian eyes the removal of the evil had restored the world's equilibrium.

Further reading

For general discussions of Mesopotamian magic (and medicine), see Reiner (1966), Bottéro (1988), Farber (1995), Biggs (1995), Maul (2001), Thomsen (2001), and van Bimsbergen and Wiggermann (1999) (but cf. Schwemer 2007a: 149–157); many Akkadian incantations and prayers have been translated by Foster (2005). Contributions to the scholarly debate on the relationship between *āšipūtu* and *asûtu* include Ritter (1965), Stol (1993), Scurlock (1999), and Böck (forthcoming).

Editions of early Sumerian and Semitic incantations can be found in Krebernik (1984), an important group of late third-millennium Sumerian incantations has recently been edited by van Dijk and Geller (2003); a catalogue of third and early second-millennium Akkadian and Sumerian incantations with bibliography forms part of Cunningham (1997). An easy access to first-millennium Sumerian and bilingual incantations is now provided by Schramm (2001, incantations for drawing a magic circle; 2008, compendium of various texts) and Geller (2007, *Udug-Hul* 'Evil Demons'; cf. also Geller 1985).

Many ritual genres are accessible in comprehensive studies, editions or translations. For the Lamaštu ritual, see Farber (1980–83; 1987c) and Wiggermann (2000); for the related incantations for calming babies, see Farber (1989) and van der Toorn (1999); for the demon Pazuzu, see Heeßel (2002); for Ardat-lili, see Lackenbacher (1971), Farber (1987a), and Geller (1988). For the evil eye, originally bound to a (human or demonic) agent, but regarded as a demonic force in its own right, see Thomsen (1992), Geller (2003; 2004), Schwemer (2007a: 67–68). For rituals against ghosts, see Scurlock (2006); for necromantic rituals, see Finkel (1983–84) and Tropper (1989). For rituals against curse (*māmītu*), see Reiner (1958), Borger (2000) (*Šurpu*), and Maul (2010); for anti-witchcraft rituals and witchcraft beliefs, see Meier (1937, 1966) and Abusch and Schwemer (2008) (*Maqlû*), as well as Thomsen (1987), Abusch (2002), Schwemer (2007a), and Abusch and Schwemer (2011); for impotency therapies, see Biggs (1967). For dream-rituals, see Oppenheim (1956), and Butler (1998); for *namburbû*-rituals, see Maul (1994); a still useful discussion of the substitute king ritual can be found in Kümmel (1967). For foundation rituals, see Ambos (2004), and for other apotropaic rituals for houses, see Wiggermann (1992); for the fabrication and use of amulets, see Schuster-Brandis (2008). The role of the stars in Mesopotamian magic generally is discussed by Reiner (1995).

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PART V

INTERPRETATIONS

The world is a messy, complicated place in which dangerous things happen at unexpected times and places, in uncontrollable ways. There are a myriad ways in which people construct meaning from their experiences, whether through myth, metaphor, or other models. This is as true of Assyriologists trying to interpret the evidence of the ancient past as it of the ancients themselves trying to make sense of what they saw, read, and felt. Henri Frankfort, for instance, famously argued that ancient Near Eastern thought was 'mythopoeic', characterized by a preference for the literal and allegorical over the logical and theoretical (Frankfort 1946). That stance has had its sympathizers, even in recent times (e.g. Wengrow 1999: 604–605), but more recent works have seriously undermined it. On the one hand, the whole idea of ancient mentalities has been called into question—'collectivities do not think, only individuals do' (Lloyd 1990: 5; cf., e.g., Simms 1999)—along with the notion of ancient Greek 'science' as the miraculous harbinger of modernity. On the other hand, there has been a highly influential movement in cognitive linguistics, though not without its critics, which argues that the human brain is hard-wired to think and express itself metaphorically (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; 1999; cf., e.g., Sowa 1999; Steen 2000). Finally, close analysis of the mass of scholarly writings published since Frankfort's day has shown indubitable examples of metaphorical, abstract, and theoretical reasoning (e.g. Rochberg 1996; Veldhuis 2006).

The ability to organize, systematize, and manage data from the world, and to interpret it in context-appropriate ways, is the common theme of Ulla Koch's and John Steele's Chapters 21 and 22. Steele looks at the shift from Mesopotamian calendars constructed on simple mathematical models of the ideal year to one based on detailed celestial observation in the first millennium BC. He discusses its effects on the relationship between political power and scholarly expertise, as the decision to intercalate—to add 'leap months' to keep the lunar and solar cycles aligned—was taken out of royal hands and became routinized. Calendars were one means of interpreting the movements of the

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heavenly bodies; another was divination. Koch compares astrology and extispicy—divination from the entrails of sacrificial animals—as systems of interpreting divine messages about the future. As both Koch and Steele hint, and as Eckart Frahm demonstrates explicitly in Chapter 24, kings often chose to be centrally involved in scholarly interpretations of the world, either as patron of others' endeavours or even as a direct participant in such activities.

Koch and Frahm both review modern Assyriological interpretations of their topics, as do Fabienne Huber Vulliet and Heather Baker. In Chapter 23 Huber Vulliet presents a new interpretation of the so-called Royal Correspondence of Ur, whose contents are often treated as key witnesses to the collapse of the Ur III dynasty at the end of the third millennium. By comparing their structures and formularies with those of archival letters, she argues that they were treated not as 'historiographical' documents in cuneiform culture but as models of elegant epistolography. In a similarly iconoclastic vein, Baker argues in Chapter 25 that to view the Babylonian city, even Babylon itself, purely as an architectural stage for expessions of political power is to ignore its fundamental role as an inhabited space. Integrating archaeological and textual evidence, she explores how the ancient inhabitants of Babylon experienced it not just as a series of domestic environments but also as a collection of communities and settings for religious practices.

Elsewhere in the volume, Francesca Rochberg compares astrology and extispicy from another perspective in Chapter 29, while Silvie Zamazalová and Karen Radner discuss different aspects of royal involvement in scholarship in Chapters 15 and 17 respectively. Literary images of kingship, including those in literary letters, are reinterpreted by Nicole Brisch in Chapter 33, and in Chapter 26 Eleanor Robson re-examines the role of creativity and innovation in cuneiform culture.

Further reading

Brown (2000; 2003) presents a controversial thesis that the interpretation of heavenly phenomena underwent a 'scientific revolution' in the 7th century BC (cf. e.g. Steele 2001; Verderame 2001). Rochberg (2004) takes a more gradualist view, set within a heavyweight discussion of the changing historiography of cuneiform 'science' in the 20th century. A briefer overview of similar issues in Babylonian mathematics is given by Høyrup (1996). Van de Mieroop (1999) considers in turn a variety of different interpretations of Mesopamian history, excluding intellectual culture but nevertheless useful.

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CHAPTER 21

SHEEP AND SKY: SYSTEMS OF DIVINATORY INTERPRETATION

ULLA SUSANNE KOCH

In any well-appointed cuneiform library, whether that of the private scholar, the king and his court, or the temple, there were texts aplenty concerned with omens and divination. Indeed divination forms a perhaps surprisingly large proportion of transmitted cuneiform scholarship in the Akkadian language. For instance, tablets concerned with divination probably made up a quarter of the holdings of the famous library of the Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal. Even though this king took an especially keen interest in scholarly and religious matters (see Frahm in this volume) and his library was significantly larger than most cuneiform libraries, in this respect its composition nevertheless is representative also of smaller collections. The written tradition in Mesopotamian divination stems from beginning of the second millennium BC and was kept alive until the very end of cuneiform culture towards the beginning of the Common Era. Remnants of it survived in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Classical traditions, and its echoes are with us even today in horoscopic astrology.

To judge by the sustained transmission of the tradition as well as the sheer amount of textual evidence, divination must have played an important role in the second and first millennium cuneiform cultures of Babylonia and Assyria. The divinatory disciplines developed and changed, and their popularity rose and fell over the millennia, but the charting of their history is still far from complete.

The major disciplines of divination

In this chapter the focus will be on two of the major divinatory disciplines: extispicy (divination by entrails of a sacrificial animal) and omen astrology as practised at the Neo-Assyrian court in the second quarter of the first millennium BC. Mesopotamian omen astrology was in many respects fundamentally different from the essentially Hellenistic

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version of horoscopic astrology in use today. Unlike horoscopic astrology, omen astrology was not based on the concept of the zodiac, the belt of twelve signs along the ecliptic through which the sun, moon, and planets travel, but primarily concerned with planetary and lunar phenomena close to the horizon. The practitioners of omen astrology made actual observations and did not rely on computations of the positions of the planets; unlike horoscopy, the focus of omen astrology was not the character and fate of the individual but the welfare of the community and the king. However, horoscopic astrology inherited and adapted elements from omen astrology and indeed the earliest preserved rudimentary horoscopes stem from Mesopotamia (Rochberg 1998; Rochberg 2004: 98–208). The zodiac itself was probably a Mesopotamian invention. It is first attested in cuneiform sources from the early 5th century BC (Neugebauer 1975: 593), and the twelve zodiacal signs include some of the seventeen constellations of the 'Path of the Moon' which were used as points of reference in omen astrology (Rochberg 2004: 126–133; Figure 21.1).

There is abundant textual evidence for astrology and extispicy from the Neo-Assyrian period. The material includes omen collections and compendia, various types of commentaries and esoteric texts, descriptions of rituals, prayers, as well as letters and reports from scholars and diviners to the king. The omen compendia were serialized and transmitted in a standardized form in the first millennium BC. Alongside these canonical compendia variant traditions and smaller collections of extraneous omens also

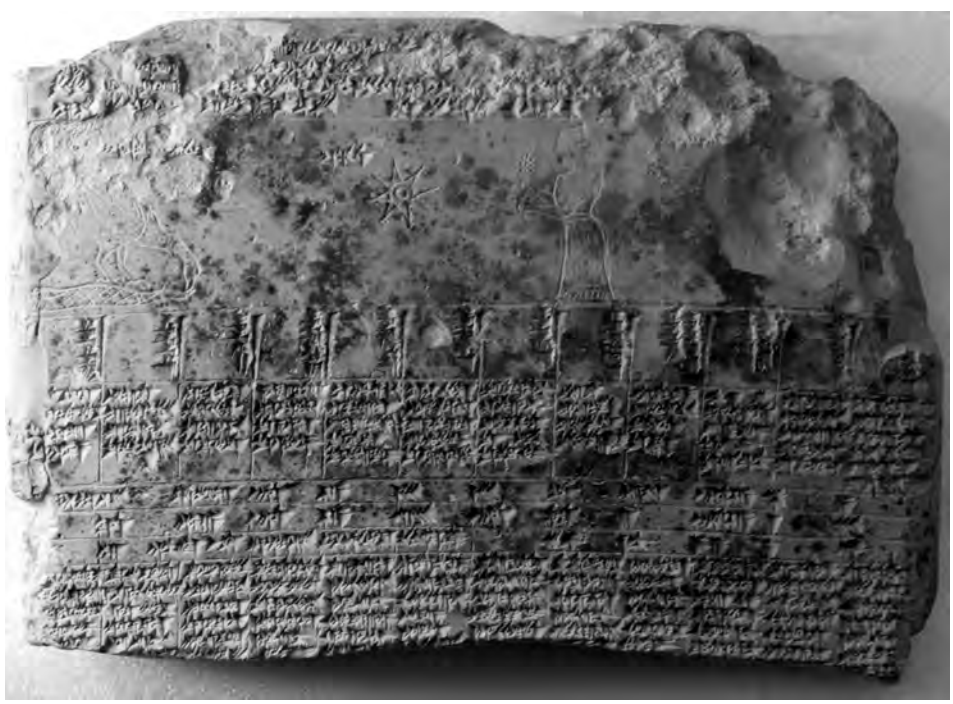

FIGURE 21.1 Late Babylonian tablet, with a drawing of the constellations Corvus and Virgo, with the planet Mercury in attendance (Louvre, AO 6448; Weidner 1967: pl. 10: tablet 2, reverse). (Photo by Philippe Clancier

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circulated. In order to help the novice understand the ancient traditions contained in the compendia, and probably also to afford the accomplished scholar some intellectual gratification, an undergrowth of commentaries and speculative texts sprang up around the compendia—for instance, explaining archaic or unclear terminology. The letters and reports from the ancient scholars (Starr 1990; Hunger 1992; Parpola 1993) give us a privileged glimpse into the practical application of the theoretical foundations made up by the omen compendia and scholia. Almost daily, the scholars and diviners of the Neo-Assyrian court reported their observations and interpretations, and counselled the king accordingly in their letters and reports. For instance, the astrologer Balasi wrote on his observations from 15 March 669 BC (italics indicate quotations from the astrological omen compendium, roman script indicates Balasi's own comments):

> *If the moon unexpectedly is late and is not seen: uprising in a ruling city.*
>
> It (the moon) sets on the 15th day and is seen with the sun on the 16th day.
>
> *If Mars keeps going around a planet: barley will become expensive.*
> *If the Raven star reaches the path of the sun: business will diminish; variant: there will be clamour.*
>
> These are the reports concern Akkad (= Babylonia). Mars is four fingers (=20') from Saturn, it has not approached the region further it has not reached it, I have (nevertheless) excerpted (the relevant omina). What does it matter: let the pertinent apotropaic rituals be performed.
>
> *If the moon is seen on the 16th day: the king of Subartu (= Assyria) will be strong and have no equal.*
>
> *If the moon is surrounded by a halo and a planet stands in it: robbers will go on a rampage.*
> *If the Moon is surrounded by a halo and Mars stands in it: loss of cattle and the beast of the steppe, the kur-measure will become small, the cultivated fields and the dates will not thrive, Amurru will grow weak.*
> *If the moon is surrounded by a halo and the Field-star stands in it: diminishing of grain.*
>
> The Field-star is Virgo.
> From Balasi.
> From this point Mars will go away, it is [in front] of Saturn. [The moon] will complete the day in the month of Nisannu (I). (Hunger 1992: no. 82)

Some of the scholars could be quite loquacious and their letters and reports are not just a source for the practice of divination, but also for the working conditions and the relationships of the scholars at the Neo-Assyrian court (e.g. Koch-Westenholz 1995: 56–75; Rochberg 2004: 209–236; Robson 2011: 605–611). The vast majority of letters and reports concern astrological matters; only very few pertain to extispicy, and we have only a few letters from diviners. Instead, the practical application of extispicy is attested in terse extispicy

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reports and queries. Extispicy queries were standardized and formulaic texts that included a precisely formulated question, some ritual elements, and the results of a performed extispicy session. The extispicy reports and queries (Starr 1990) were all concerned with matters of state or the household of the king. They give the appearance of being the diviners' notes and were not meant as library works of reference. Another kind of query, known as *tāmītu*-texts (Lambert 2007), concerns private persons and does not cite actual extispicies. The *tāmītus* were collected and copied by scholars for future reference. We also have fragmentary descriptions of the extispicy rituals (Zimmern 1901: nos. 1–20) and the prayers of the diviner (Zimmern 1901: nos. 75–101; Starr 1983) as well as parts of a 'handbook' which seems to have contained all the most basic information the diviner needed to practise his art, such as a list of days suitable for divination (Koch 2005: 273–297).

Astrology and extispicy illustrate the variation in the practice of divination within the cuneiform tradition. Both flourished in the Neo-Assyrian period and the two complemented each other. By its very nature, extispicy gave the sort of information that could not be obtained through astrology and vice versa. Where astrology was the gods' mouthpiece, extispicy permitted humankind to initiate communication with the gods and set the agenda.

The nature of divination

The very nature of divination itself has often been discussed in fields of research such as theology, anthropology, and history. It has been described as having, or uniting, traits which are characteristic of religion, magic, science, or scholarship—or quite the reverse, it has been defined as something of a bastard phenomenon *not* quite belonging to the domain of religion, magic, science, or scholarship (see, e.g., Peek 1991; Larsen 1987). Divination has also been described from a purely functionalist perspective, as a way of dealing with social or cognitive uncertainty (Malinowski 1945). These purposes it undoubtedly also serves and served, but that does not explain its expressions or content. Neither are these functions characteristic only of divination but hold true for a range of other cultural and/or religious phenomena. It can also be argued that divination is not only a way of reducing anxiety but equally a way of generating it—as the reports of the Neo-Assyrian court astrologers amply demonstrate. As we shall see, assiduous observation of the earth and sky for ominous signs provides no lack of new topics to worry about. Divination is in fact so complex and multifaceted a phenomenon that it would be overly reductionist to explain it with reference to a single theory. Like 'religion' itself, divination is what Pascal Boyer (1996) called an 'impure subject', exactly because it cannot be explained or described within a single theoretical framework. However, whatever roots divination may have, and whatever purposes it may serve, whether epistemological, psychological, social, political, or religious, divination in whatever form it takes, is, and has always been, a practical means of obtaining otherwise inaccessible information (e.g. Cryer 1994; Tedlock 2001). It is from this perspective we will view it here. From this point of view the first questions are: What kind of

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information is sought? From which sources did it stem? By what technique was it obtained? Can it be trusted?

Information

It is obvious that divination does not provide just any kind of otherwise hidden or inaccessible information. Nobody ever resorted to divination to find out how many angels could stand on a pinhead or what would be for dinner. Divination provides information of the most vital importance for the life, health, and happiness of the individual, their immediate kin, or the wider social group. In Mesopotamia, we find that divination served almost any such need and any individual or group. There were forms of divination to provide information relevant for the everyday decisions and concerns of the households of merchants and farmers, for king and commoner. Divination dealt with many matters of importance in life, such as determining the right time for a journey, deciding whether a suitor really had marriagable potential, finding out the gender of your offspring in the womb, or diagnosing the causes of illness or misfortune. For the king as head of state, divination served as an important element in decision-making, helping him confirm strategy or appointments, and alerting him to disasters threatening his kingdom, his subjects, or himself (Pongratz-Leisten 1999; Radner in this volume).

Source

What makes the source of divinatory information special and different from other sources of information is that it has supernatural or superhuman qualities. One of the defining characteristics of superhuman beings like gods is exactly that they have unlimited access to all kinds of knowledge (Boyer 2001; Tremlin 2006). Fortunately, they are often willing to share the information, or they can be persuaded to do so through the techniques of divination. However, just as normal information can be obtained by reading environmental cues and may not involve any form of communication at all, so special information can also be elicited from such cues without any direct communication with the divine. This corresponds to Peirce's distinction between communicative and indexical signs: an arrow traced in the sand is a communicative sign 'follow me'; the tracks of an animal in the sand are an indexical sign, having a direct link with the animal (Sørensen forthcoming). In the various Mesopotamian divinatory disciplines, signs could be read both ways. Some of us fear bad luck when we see a black cat crossing the road. We may interpret the straying feline as a warning sent to us on purpose from the powers that be, or merely as an indicator of misfortune in the same way that diving swallows are harbingers of rain. Though signs were often read and interpreted as direct communications from the gods, they could also be understood simply as indicators and not as messages of warning or reassurance or expressions of divine will. The discussion of the theistic versus the mechanistic aspects of divination is longstanding in Assyriology (e.g. Bottéro 1992; Gadd 1948).

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Technique

In many Mesopotamian divinatory disciplines information was obtained through reading and interpreting signs (*ittu*) or oracular answers (*tāmītu*) obtained through special rituals. Oracular speech and experienced epiphanies are not nearly as well attested in cuneiform cultures (Pongratz-Leisten 1999: 47–120). The reading of signs according to a fixed semantic code is central to many divination systems, not least the Mesopotamian ones. Both induced signs obtained by a ritual procedure as well as observed signs found outside the frame of a ritual setting were read and interpreted according to fixed rules. The hermeneutics used within Mesopotamian divination as a means of revealing layers upon layers of meaning in the divinatory system are themselves worthy of further study (Frahm 2004). Unravelling the semantic code utilized in a given divinatory system can yield insight into the social, ethical, and other normative bias of the culture from which it springs (Sørensen 1999; Turner 1961; Peek 1991). Much research within this area remains to be done for the Mesopotamian material. The earliest compendia of ominous signs, structured according to the character of the sign, date to the Old Babylonian period (early second millennium BC). Most of these divinatory texts have the list format utilized in all kinds of cuneiform scholarship from earliest times. It went against the norms of the written traditions to express generalized principles; an idea was best presented by illustrative examples. For divination this meant lists of individual omens, each consisting of two clauses we now call *protasis* and *apodosis*: 'If X happened: Y happens' (Larsen 1987; Brown 2000: 76; Veldhuis 1997: 137–146). The nature and origin of the relationship between these two parts has been much discussed (Rochberg 2004: 265–273). The two phenomena were definitely perceived to be linked, though not in a deterministic way; rather X was indicative of Y, and vice versa. Neither was the link understood as directly causal nor the relationship in time between the two parts absolute.

Mesopotamian divination was not based on the observation of spectacular or unusual phenomena like, for instance, the Roman prodigies were. Instead it focused on small variations on or from what was considered the norm. In extispicy normal, healthy organs, which were neither deformed nor marked by parasites or illness, were positive signs (Jeyes 1989: 51–96; Meyer 1987: 81–92), while in astrology it was considered favourable if the heavenly bodies rose, set, and culminated according to the ideal calendar (Brown 2000: 105–160). Of course prodigies could also be noted—malformed animal births were of particular interest—but such phenomena did not form part of the everyday business of divination.

On a very basic theoretical level the divinatory genres all worked alike. Any ominous phenomenon was associated either with 'us' or with 'the enemy'. Planets and stars were either hostile or friendly, marks on the liver either significant for 'us' or 'them'. All kinds of phenomena formed part of a complicated web of such classifications that permeated all sorts of divination. The changes or appearances, of the phenomena were classified as either positive or negative signs: bright, big, white, healthy, normal, on time, on the right side, were generally favourable appearances, whereas dull, small, black, deformed, not on time, on the left side were generally unfavourable. The arithmetic of divination was simple: phenomenon + appearance = sign. Thus a positive phenomenon—one associated with 'us' combined with a positive sign—would give the result: favourable for

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'us'. Similarly, a negative phenomenon—one associated with the enemy, combined with a positive sign—was unfavourable for 'us', and so on. This rule was in practice tempered and peppered with exceptions, modifications, and contradictions. Further adding to the complexity, the classification of positive and negative signs did not only follow a binary pattern but depended on other schemata as well. These included colours (red, green, white, yellow), time (days of the month), spatial subdivisions (top, middle, bottom), orientation (right, left or north, south, east, west), as well as various patterns of association, analogy, and contrast (Meyer 1987: 81–92; Rochberg 2004: 55–58; Neusner 1990).

Perhaps to be as exhaustive as possible, the compilers of the omen compendia sometimes filled in these schemata to extremes, which meant that already from the earliest periods omen series included phenomena that could never actually occur in nature—for instance, a lunar eclipse on the 20th, 21st, or even around the 30th day of the month (e.g. Rochberg-Halton 1988: 138–155). Such phenomena are impossible in a calendar based on the lunar cycle, in which by definition the new moon appeared on the 1st day of the month. The moon completes its journey round the earth in a little less than 30 days (the synodic month). Normally, a Babylonian lunar month would be either 29 or 30 days long, depending on when the astrologers first spotted the lunar crescent in the rays of the setting sun on the dusty horizon. Full moon and thus eclipses occur on average 14.7 days after conjunction with the sun, so lunar eclipses are only possible around the middle of the month. Impossible protases are found in all kinds of divination compendia, including extispicy. Even though mentioned in the omen compendia, a sheep without a heart or liver is unlikely ever to have made it to the diviner's sacrificial table.

Like many other Mesopotamian textual genres, omen compendia appear fully fledged with no real forerunners, so we have to assume that the written tradition was founded on well-established oral practices. Over the millennia the omen compendia changed, traditions vanished and new appeared, but the stream of tradition became relatively fixed by the beginning of the first millennium BC (Rochberg 2004: 63–65). Whereas the omen compendia themselves were relatively stable by the Neo-Assyrian period, commentaries and esoteric texts about them continued to expand and evolve. These commentaries attest to the struggles the scholars themselves had to reconcile the many inconsistencies and handle the ambiguities of their age-old transmitted tradition. For instance the commentary *Šumma Sin ina Tāmartišu* 'If the moon at its appearance' explains an omen from the 1st tablet of the astrological omen compendium *Enuma Anu Enlil* (Verderame 2002: 15–29; Koch-Westenholz 1999: 155):

> *If the moon is seen at an inappropriate time: dispersal of a city*. This means: it is seen on the 29th or the 30th.

The rather vague term 'at an inappropriate time' is here defined as the two last days of the month. The ideal length for a Babylonian lunar month was 30 days. It was considered favourable if the moon 'completed the day', bringing the month in harmony with his own mystical number 30 (Koch-Westenholz 1995: 99–104). The commentary 'If the moon at its appearance' thus interpreted the protasis as referring to too early a conjunction between moon and sun. The commentaries were by no means prescriptive and the scholars frequently applied interpretations completely at odds with them. For instance,

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in one report the astrologer Balasi interpreted this omen as referring to too late an opposition of the moon and the sun, when the full moon occurred on the 15th instead of on the 14th as would have been most favourable (Hunger 1992: no. 91).

Trustworthiness

As with any kind of communication, the validity of the information is of course totally dependent on the validity of the source and its medium. In theory, the gods were the source of the information and also of the medium of divination; what better mark of reliability could one wish for? For astrology we hear how the gods themselves decided to send certain phenomena as signs. The canonical compendium of astrological omens was named after the first words of its introduction, *Enūma Anu Enlil*, which tells the story:

> When An, Enlil and Enki, the great gods, by their decision established the eternal order of heaven and earth and the boat of Sin (the moon-god), the new moon to wax, to give birth to the month and the sign of heaven and earth, they caused the celestial boat to appear and to come forth in the heavens, to be seen (Verderame 2002: 9–13).

In the first millennium BC extispicy was often described as a 'secret of Heaven and Earth'. According to one Babylonian tradition, the lore of extispicy was revealed to mankind by Ea, the god of wisdom (e.g. Koch 2005: 56–59). Another Babylonian myth explaining the origin of two branches of Babylonian divination, lecanomancy—divination from the formation of drops of oil on water—and extispicy, tells how they were revealed by the gods of divination, Šamaš and Adad (Steinkeller 2005), to the ancient king of Sippar, Enmeduranki. Enmeduranki in his turn passed the information on to the men of Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon (Lambert 1967).

The weak link was the diviners. If we accept that divination is a sort of communication, we must also admit that it is not a very straightforward kind. It requires special technical skill, and the rules of interpretation—the divinatory code—are often very complex. It was therefore the domain of highly specialized experts, scholars, and diviners. Divination itself was considered sacred lore but the surrounding textual commentary was merely the esoteric property of scholars. A text from Late Babylonian Uruk explains: 'reading of (what has to do with) the great gods is the secret lore of Heaven and Earth, reading the commentary is the secret lore of the scholars' (Hunger 1968: no. 519). The diviner held the 'hermeneutic keys' to the divinatory code and, ideally, the diviner was merely a lens through which divine communication passed without distortion. There is no evidence or indeed reason to suppose that Mesopotamian scholars and diviners ever attempted to verify the results of their interpretations and speculations by experiment. They did not need to test their craft, and they undoubtedly found it confirmed by events. For example, one scholar told the Assyrian king that:

> the Series says in connection with this eclipse in the month of Nisan: 'If Jupiter is present in the eclipse, all is well with the king, a noble dignitary will die in his

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place.' Did the king pay attention to this? A full month has not yet passed (before) his chief judge lay dead!' (Parpola 1993: no. 90).

In the extispicy questions the diviner explicitly stated his neutrality: 'Your great divinity knows, I, your slave, a diviner, do not know' (e.g. Lambert 2007: no. 21). Indeed, to judge by the sources the reliability of the ritual procedure was never subject to any doubt. Individual diviners potentially had access to very sensitive matters of state, and it was of course recognized that as mere mortals they were fallible or susceptible to pressure to compromise their craft. This was openly admitted by one expert in scribal lore and divination, who claimed to have been drunk under the table and coerced into performing lecanomancy or extispicy for the Assyrian king's enemy, no less. But he also claimed that the divination was a colossal fraud ('nothing but wind') and that the only thing on his mind was: 'may he not kill me' (Parpola 1993: no. 179). It is tempting to compare divination with, for instance, economics. Today not every statesman or businessman trusts his economic advisors implicitly, but that does not mean he is ready to experiment or question the very rationale of economics itself.

The two divinatory disciplines were in fact practised by two different groups of experts: the 'seer' or diviner (*bārû*) whose main field of expertise included provoked omens, extispicy, and lecanomancy; and the scribe/scholar (*ṭupšarru*) whose expertise included astrological and other kinds of unprovoked omens, and who had a working knowledge of the relevant aversive rituals. Only very few scholars mastered both kinds of divination. Court astrologers often came from families with scholarly traditions going back centuries, but other than the proper education there were no special prerequisites to fulfil and no initiation as such, as far as we know. The texts were almost impossible to understand without training, as one scholar explained to the Assyrian king: '(The omen compendium) *Šumma Izbu* "If a foetal anomaly" is difficult to understand . . . Really, one who has not had the meaning pointed out to him cannot possibly understand it' (Parpola 1993: no. 60). Their knowledge was jealously guarded: 'scholarship is not divulged in the market-place' as one Assyrian scholar put it (Hunger 1992: no. 338; Beaulieu 1992). Many divinatory texts ended with the injunction: 'He who knows, may see it, he who does not know, may not.' There seem, however, to have been stricter demands on the qualifications of the diviner. Texts describing the ideal qualifications of the diviner specify (Lambert 1998): the right parentage, ideally descent from the sage Enmeduranki; a body free of defects; and a competent mind in command of the profession and its secrets. A descendant who does not answer these qualifications may not perform extispicy: 'they (the gods) will not disclose the secret answer to his query'. However, there is no evidence from other sources that in reality the diviner had to be of a special lineage. Though expertise was normally passed on within the family, anybody could in principle be taught the craft. The texts go on to instruct the diviner: 'The learned scholar, who guards the secrets of the great gods, shall make the son he loves swear an oath by tablet and stylus before Šamaš and Adad, and then teach him.' The reference to the diviner making his son or apprentice swear by tablet and stylus could refer to an initiation ritual, but we have no actual descriptions of such rites.

On a very generic level extispicy and astrology, as well as many other kinds of divination, can be said to follow the same simple procedure—as noted already by the Roman

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orator Cicero (*De divinatione* I vi 12, xviii 34) and more recently elaborated on by Sørensen (1999):

- Experiment: observing or manipulating specific phenomena or media in a certain way, at a certain time, for instance looking at the sky for the moon or planets at sunset, cutting open a perfect sheep at dawn, dripping three drops of oil into a bowl of water after dinner, etc.
- Interpretation and application: applying the divinatory code, looking for pertinent omens and relating them to the situation at hand, at the same time looking for signs or interpretations which might counterbalance each other.
- Actualization: deciding, how does this affect us? What to do about it? Is ritual action required?

Each step entailed the application of hermeneutic principles and rules of observation and interpretation. In the following I will describe this procedure as it was practised in Mesopotamian omen astrology and extispicy respectively.

Astrological omens: Signs sent from the gods

The topic of most astrological omens was the public domain or the fate of the king as either a private or a public person. Many omens concerned harvest, flood, rain, warfare, starvation, or locust attacks, and other events which could affect the community as a whole but not the individual on a personal level. Unlike other Babylonian divinatory disciplines astrology was concerned with geographical and political entities. Many of the apodoses apply to specific countries, cities, or nations. Astrological omens were therefore matters of state and the concern of the king. Sometimes the celestial bodies were seen as direct reflections of the gods, as when an expression of affection by the goddess Ištar was manifested in Venus, her planetary counterpart (Hunger 1992: no. 27) The gods could be relied upon to tell the king if he had any grounds for worry: 'The gods have opened the ears of the king, my lord. If anything should [happen] to the king, so that he should become worried [*break*] [the gods] would forthwith send a sign from heavens saying [*break*]' (Hunger 1992: no. 63).

A famous text, dubbed the Diviner's Manual by its editor (Oppenheim 1974), gives a unique description of the scholar's situation:

> When you look up a sign, be it one in the sky or one on earth, and if that sign's evil portent is confirmed, then it has indeed occurred for you in reference to an enemy or to a disease or to a famine. Check the date of that sign, and should no sign have occurred to counterbalance that sign, should no annulment have taken place, one cannot make it pass by, its evil cannot be removed, it will happen. . . . When you have identified the sign, and when they ask you to save the city, the king and his subjects from the enemy, pestilence and famine, what will you say? When they complain to you, how will you make (the evil) bypass them?

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The way to dispel the portended evil was then explained thus: the scholar should compute the exact date of the sign's occurrence, compare it to the calendar, and determine if the evil would bypass his clients, apparently based on this evidence. If everything else failed, perhaps recalculating the date would help (Williams 2002). It was not unheard of to take advantage of calendrical loopholes as way of avoiding bad omens (e.g. Parpola 1993: no. 6), but this text has a somewhat special procedure for making the evil pass by. The modern title Diviner's Manual is probably a bit of a misnomer, but it nevertheless gives us a vivid picture of the working conditions of the scholar.

First step: the experiment

The scholar first of all had to observe and determine if a phenomenon was relevant and should be identified as a sign. Unlike their modern counterparts the ancient astrologers actually spent a lot of time observing the sky, 'keeping the king's watch'. The Neo-Assyrian kings had scholars living both in the capital and in cities throughout the kingdom, who sent their reports to him (Parpola 1983: XIV–XXI). There is no evidence that sky-gazing was accompanied by special rites or preparatory purification rituals. The Neo-Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers affiliated with the court observed the sky every night, with particular zeal around new moon and full moon. Deciding what to look for and what was significant in itself demanded an extensive knowledge of the tradition, both oral and written. The first question that faced the astrologer was: Of all the possible observable celestial phenomena on a given night—including rain, clouds, and thunder—which are relevant and need to be brought to the attention of the king? From the letters and reports from Babylonian and Assyrian scholars to the Neo-Assyrian kings, we learn that their subjective judgement was certainly involved. When we have reports from more than one scholar pertaining to the same night we see that they did not always deem the same phenomena to be important or relevant. Of course we cannot know whether the inclusion or exclusion of given phenomena reflected the skill or the intentions of the individual scholars. For instance, we have reports from nine different scholars reporting on celestial phenomena of 15 March 669 BC: the delayed appearance of the full moon combined with the conjunction of Saturn and Mars with the moon in Virgo (Koch-Westenholz 1995: 140–151); one of these reports, from the astrologer Balasi, is quoted above. Seven of the scholars mention the fact that the full moon occurred on the 16th day of the month, which was late; eight mention the conjunction of Mars with the moon; only five report the conjunction of Mars and Saturn; one looked at Jupiter in Taurus; and one, namely Balasi, reports that the moon was in the constellation Virgo. To some writers the conjunction was of great importance, while others disregarded it altogether. Some were preoccupied with the late appearance of the full moon, while two ignored it completely and one restricted himself to pointing out that opposition would occur timely on the 14th of the following month.

In general, to judge from the reports it is evident that firstly lunar and secondly planetary phenomena were of pre-eminent importance. In the case of the moon a

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particularly close watch was kept at conjunction with the sun (new moon) and opposition with the sun (full moon). When observing the planets, risings and settings, stationary points, conjunctions, and oppositions were of interest, and the astrologers seem to have been particularly interested in phenomena close to the horizon and in the ecliptic (Brown 2000: 81–85). When making their observations and quoting omens the scholars tended to follow roughly the same order as the arrangement of the astrological compendium *Enūma Anu Enlil* itself: lunar phenomena, planetary phenomena, and finally stars and constellations. But the order of observation was not strictly followed, unlike extispicy reports where the order of inspection of the entrails was already fixed in the earliest periods (see below).

One way to determine whether a phenomenon was relevant—or 'confirmed' as the Diviner's Manual puts it—was by analogy. If the observed phenomenon itself could not be found in the omen compendia one had to decide whether an analogy applied. This is best illustrated, perhaps, by a case where the king asked his scholar whether an omen concerning something passing between the legs of a man could also pertain to something passing under a chariot (Parpola 1993: no. 33). The scholar answered yes, 'we will take it as a portent': a mongoose running under a chariot from left to right can be interpreted according to the omen 'If a mongoose passes between the legs of a man: the hand of god or the hand of the king will seize him.' On the other hand, the relevance of the phenomenon was also dependent on the time and place of its occurrence, and whether there was any cause to be on the lookout for signs of divine displeasure. For instance, when the king fretted about a stroke of lightning in a place called Harihumba, the scholar answered a bit testily 'Why does the king look for trouble, and why does he look for it in the home of a tiller? There is no evil inside the palace, and when has the king ever visited Harihumba?' (Parpola 1993: no. 42). So even though analogy applies, the ominous event had to occur at a relevant time and place.

Second step: the interpretation

Having made the observations and decided what could be significant, the scholars would try to collect and write out all relevant omens pertaining to the observed celestial phenomena. In order to do this the astrologers again applied a number of hermeneutic rules of analogy and identification. We do not always have explicit sources for these rules—and as mentioned above they were probably part of the oral tradition referred to in the commentaries as 'from the mouths of scholars' (*ša pî ummânī*). The relevant omens were called the 'interpretation' or 'solution' (*pišru*). The astrologer's task was then to compare one specific case—the phenomenon observed in the sky—with the literally thousands of specific cases recorded as omens (*šumu*) (Parpola 1983: 40), and select the ones which they deemed relevant. Normally, scholars did not give any references for the omens they quoted or the interpretations they offered, though one scholar emphasizes that he was quoting the omen 'exactly as it was written on the tablet' (Parpola 1993: no. 362).

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Identification of celestial bodies with one another was a common means of getting the most out of an observation, allowing omens originally pertaining to one star to be adduced in connection with another. For instance, in the report from Balasi quoted above (Hunger 1992: no. 82), he identifies the constellation the Field-star (Pegasus) with Virgo, and the planet Mars with the Raven-star (Corvus). In this way he is able to draw on omens originally pertaining to a different constellation and can even adduce an omen concerning a fixed star to the interpretation of the movements of a planet, The rules of identification are often obscure to us. They were not always consistently applied and conflicting traditions existed side by side. On top of that, the planets and many of the fixed stars had many aliases. Mars, for instance, was known as 'the enemy' (*nakru*), 'the liar' (*sarru*) and the 'strange' (*ahû*) (Koch-Westenholz 1995: 128–130). Not only was the nomenclature manifold, but the technical terminology used to describe celestial phenomena was not fixed. Protases referring to the same phenomenon couched in different terms were collected and listed in the compendia, again adding to the scholar's choices.

Part of the interpretation was also looking for counterbalancing signs or interpretations. A total lunar eclipse could be a very unfavourable omen for the king, but it was counterbalanced and cancelled if Jupiter was visible during the eclipse. Similarly, if full moon did not occur on the 14th this portent could be counterbalanced by Saturn standing in conjunction with the moon on the 14th. This counterbalancing hinged on the practice of identifying celestial bodies with each other; Saturn was, for instance, identified with the sun and Jupiter with the moon (Koch-Westenholz 1995: 120–125).

The astrologers' manuals were an embarrassment of riches. Again, the breadth and depth of the scholar's expertise was decisive for how many pertinent cases he would collect. To further add to the scholars' liberty of interpretation, the application of the rules and generalizations also seems to have been a matter of discretion. Two scholars starting from entirely different premises could end with the same net result by choosing to apply different rules of interpretation (Koch-Westenholz 1995: 144). But in spite of all the theoretical ambiguities, the astrological reports almost always demonstrate internal consistency—and a certain tendency to look on the bright side.

The scholar's procedure for deciding whether a phenomenon was relevant and which omens then pertained is reminiscent of the juridical hermeneutics of, for instance, rabbinic literature. This kind of hermeneutics is generally characteristic of the interpretations of casuistic law; that is, concerning particular cases rather than general principles. In principle, casuistic legal rulings are characterized by being insufficiently generalized for their full scope to be immediately apparent. The principles of application were unclear. Just as in rabbinic literature, the very concrete rulings were presumably envisioned as instantiating broader principles, or at least as allowing for the possibility of applying a given ruling to closely related events. The question is how to define 'closely related'. How and when could a particular case be adduced? (Cavigneaux 1987; Moscovitz 2002). These questions also faced the cuneiform scholar. On an intellectual level, the scholar's task was similar to the interpreter of Talmudic law, but of course their context was totally different. Like the rabbis, the scholars believed that their knowledge ultimately was divinely ordained, but unlike the rabbis they did not aim to perfect the ways of man, only to serve his needs.

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Third step: the actualization

What to do? In most cases the scholars did not advise what to do with the information or how to interpret it. Sometimes they explained or summed up the apodoses: 'The king, my lord, should be glad, good health to the king, his son and the harem' (Hunger 1992: no. 381). The astrologers seldom recommended the performance of apotropaic or appeasement rituals, even though this fell within their field of expertise. Only in connection with eclipses did the scholars regularly refer to ritual action, but presumably rituals were carried out more often than we can ascertain. Perhaps we can take the cases for which they actually prescribed some ritual action as indicative of especially important omens. Sometimes the astrologers advised the king to take precautions, often to stay in the safety of his palace, but it is difficult to know what criteria were used to determine whether an omen called for an apotropaic ritual or not. The king was of course expected to take action both in cases concerning his own well-being and if the omen pertained to the state. Balasi in the report quoted above refers somewhat off-handedly to apotropaic rituals to avert any evil portended by the conjunction of Mars and Saturn: 'What does it matter: let the pertinent apotropaic rituals (*namburbû*) be performed' (Hunger 1992: no. 82). We know that rituals could be performed against a full moon on the wrong days—the 16th or the 13th—because it is mentioned in a letter from the chief exorcist who, in answer to a question from the king, assures him that he will instruct two other exorcists to perform the appropriate ritual (Parpola 1993: no. 238). But we cannot tell whether this was an exception or the standard procedure. As already mentioned, lunar eclipses were particularly sinister, so close watch was kept when they were expected to occur. By the early first millennium BC astrologers had sufficient knowledge of the lunar cycle to base predictions of eclipses on some rules of thumb even if they were not yet able to calculate them accurately; that only became possible later (Waerden 1966: 122; Steele in this volume). In the worst case a lunar eclipse could signify the king's death, which meant that an elaborate series of rituals had to be carried out to avert the portended evil. These rituals included the installation of a substitute king (*šar pūhi*) and queen, who were put to death after a short 'rule', while the king became a 'farmer' (Parpola 1983: XXII–XXXII). Instead of going through with the *šar pūhi* rituals one scholar suggested another way of averting the evil from the king after a total lunar eclipse. The king should remove a leader from among his vassals, thus letting these people bear the brunt of the portended disaster (Hunger 1992: no. 316). This very hands-on attitude is reflected also in a report from the scholar Nergal-eṭir to king Esarhaddon. He correctly predicts the occurrence of a partial lunar eclipse in the month of Addaru (January 673 BC) and goes on:

> *If you make (the observation) for the well-being of the king, the city and its people, all will be well. In the beginning of the year a flood will come and break the dikes.* When the moon has made the eclipse, the king, my lord, should write to me. As a substitute for the king, I will cut through a dike, here in Babylonia, in the middle of the night. No one will hear about it! (Hunger 1992: no. 250).

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In this way he intends to carry out the portended evil on a manageable scale, basically working on the same principle as an inoculation.

Extispicy: Divine answers

Whereas astrology was characterized by observation, speculation, and learned elaborations, extispicy also had a much more practical as well as a ritual element. We have no letters from diviners discussing interpretations or possible alternatives, and the reports they wrote are very straightforward. In practice the diviners only quoted a diminutive percentage of the omens collected in the extispicy omen compendium known as *bārûtu*, 'lore of the diviner' (Koch-Westenholz 2000; Robson 2011: 620–622). The commentaries could be just as sophistic as the astrological ones, but as opposed to the astrological scholia they were in practice never actually quoted by diviners in their reports (Koch 2005). The apodoses of extispicy omens are not all that different from the astrological ones, and many were indeed stock apodoses which can be found in any kind of omen. The themes were: war and peace, recovery or death, fluctuations on the market, famine or plenty, the fortunes of the king. It is characteristic of extispicy omens that every part of the entrails had a special symbolic significance (cf. Jeyes 1989; Starr 1983; 1990)—reminiscent of the lines of the hand in palmistry—and sometimes this is reflected in the apodoses. In effect, however, it was the formulation of the question that determined the content of the information gained by the performance of extispicy, not the apodoses. The topics of the questions to Šamaš and Adad for private persons were many and various and included all crucial aspects of life, including health, offspring, marriage, career opportunities, safety from enemies, and hunting luck (Lambert 2007).

The king had extispicy performed at many decisive moments in war and matters of state—for instance, when entering into peace negotiations (Starr 1990: no. 74), when a rebellion was imminent (Starr 1990: no. 139), or before appointing a high official (Starr 1990: nos. 149–182). Diviners accompanied the army on campaign (Figure 21.2), presumably to ensure the success and safety of the enterprise, as was the practice of Greek generals in classical antiquity (see, e.g., Jameson 1991; Flower 2008: 153–187).

First step: the experiment

The diviner had to perform an elaborate ritual to obtain the desired information. The whole procedure was presented as a dialogue: The diviner asked (*ša'ālu*) and the gods answered (*apālu*), preferably with a 'firm yes'. In the queries the question is formulated thus: 'Does your great divinity know it? Is it decreed and confirmed in a favourable case (of extispicy) by the command of your great divinity, Shamash, great lord? Will he who can see, see it? Will he who can hear, hear it?' (Star 1990: *passim*). The implication is that

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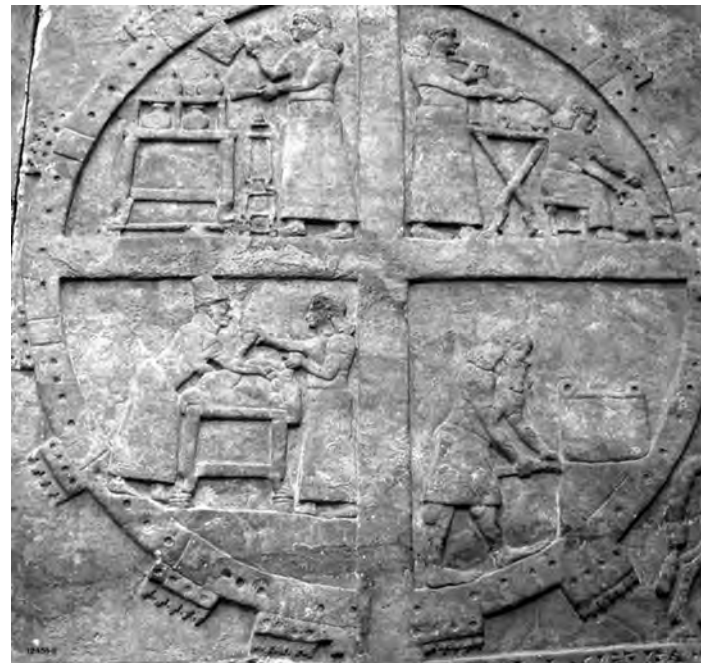

FIGURE 21.2 Assyrian diviner extracting entrails from a sacrificial animal: one of the representative scenes of daily life shown in the four quarters of a schematic depiction of an Assyrian camp. Detail from panel 8 (top register) in the throne room (Room B) of Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Kalhu, modern Nimrud, Iraq, 9th century BC (British Museum, ME 124548). (Photo by Eleanor Robson. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

the god had access to the answer and could choose to make it known to the questioner. The closing formula of the queries sums up: 'Be present in this ram; place an affirmative answer, favourable, propitious omens of the flesh of the query by the command of your great divinity, so that I may see them.' The complex first-millennium ritual lasted from sunset to sunrise, in which one or more sheep were sacrificed (Zimmern 1901: nos. 1–20). The distinction between divination and magic rituals, that gifts go from man to god in the latter not the former (Guinan 2002), does not hold for extispicy: 'The diviner shall not approach the place of judgement, he should not lift the cedar, without present and gifts, they (the gods) will not reveal to him the secret answer to his question (*tāmīt pirišti*)' (Zimmern 1901: nos: 1–20, 118).

The client did not always have to be present in person. In the queries and prayers the client was referred to as 'the owner of this (black) wool and hem (of the garment)', or he could be represented by an imprint of his fingernail on the tablet where his question was written (Zimmern 1901: no. 11). The extispicy ritual itself involved the sacrifice of four sheep: two for Šamaš and Adad, one for Aya, Šamaš's consort, and one for Bunene, their servant. The omen was taken from one of the animals sacrificed to Šamaš and Adad. During the ritual the question was literally put in front of the gods, when a clay

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tablet with the question written on it was placed in front of them. However, the question could also be whispered into the ear of the sacrificial lamb (Zimmern 1901: no. 98, 8). The gods wrote the answer in the entrails of the sacrificial lamb; and indeed the liver is likened to a tablet in the rituals of the diviner (Zimmern 1901: no. 24, 9) and elsewhere. The diviner listed all the ominous phenomena he recognized, always following the same order of inspection. This in effect gave him a checklist, making his task as observer much less open to interpretation than that of the astrologer. Though the diviner certainly needed training in order to determine which phenomena were significant and which were not, his room for variation and prowess was considerably less than the astrologer's. The diviner would measure and count the ominous phenomena and decide whether the change in them was favourable or unfavourable, there was no reason for him to quote extensively from the omen compendia or scholia. The parameters were limited, the parts of the intestines themselves never symbolized anything but themselves and they all had to be observed in a certain order. For the astrologer, the planet Mars was not always the planet Mars; sometimes, as illustrated by the report from Balasi quoted above, it was the Raven-star (Corvus). Only the astrologer aware of this would be able to read the sign and adduce the omen. The relatively small variation in the protases quoted in extispicy queries and reports also attest to this relatively limited scope (Koch-Westenholz 2000: 43; Robson 2011).

Every part of the ritual had to be performed perfectly. Jeyes (1980: 16) suggests that from a Mesopotamian perspective this was 'in order not to cause the anger of the gods' or as Starr (1990: XXVI) suggests, 'the contact of unclean . . . had the effect of making a favourable divine response impossible'. However, no reason for correct performance is explicitly stated in the texts. To safeguard the proceedings the questions addressed to the gods were hedged with caveats, the so-called *ezib* formulas, which asked them to disregard flaws in the proceedings, both mishaps outside the control of the diviner and faults of his own. These formulae were standardized but ad hoc *ezibs* pertaining to the actual situation are also attested. For instance references to the mood or idle thoughts of the diviner or his client are found in a few of the queries and *tāmitus*: 'disregard that the client may be gloomy, fearful and despondent' (Lambert 2007: no. 3, 4; cf. Starr 1990: no. 5, *passim*).

Divination combines the concept of a conversation with the much more formalized, mechanistic strictures of a magical ritual. Since it was probably relatively unclear to participants exactly how the ritual worked, what the nature of the causal link between the action and the perceived result actually was, adherence to detail became paramount (Sørensen 2007: chapter 6). This is true for any kind of action, including the more trivial kinds such as following a recipe. If we are uncertain why a particular procedure should be followed we had better stick to it or we might end up with pancakes instead of a soufflé.

Second step: the interpretation

Often the diviner does not quote any apodosis at all, so we cannot be sure if he had any particular omens in mind. In astrology the statements of the apodoses were extremely relevant but in extispicy all that mattered was their general positive, negative, or

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equivocal value—or how they affected the time frame. The liver and lung were divided up into a grid—every part significant either for 'us' or the 'enemy' (cf. Koch 2005: nos. 107–109)—and in combination with a positive or negative appearance this would yield a number of positive and negative signs which were weighed against each other to find the result (Figure 21.3). If there were many negative signs, the extispicy was deemed uncertain and had to be repeated. It is a bit of a conundrum why the extispicy omen compendia existed at all. Why were all those detailed omens created, collected, and compiled, if what one ended up with after inspection of the entrails was in no way related to the apodoses? And the diviner had most probably even learned these apodoses by heart, if we are to believe a caption from an esoteric extispicy text which lists a number of omen tablets which should 'be present in your mind when you have lifted the parts relevant for extispicy' (Koch 2005: no. 58, 57–62). The earliest compendia and reports demonstrate the same gap between theory and practice; the compendia were apparently only written for intellectual purposes, not for practical ones (e.g. Veldhuis 1999; 2006). We can only speculate about a time when the symbolic significance of the parts of the entrails may have mattered and been actively used by the diviner as an interpretative tool, in line with, for instance, the Ndembu diviner's basket of tokens in mid-20th-century Zambia (Turner 1961) or, as mentioned, the lines of your palm. Perhaps the thousands of specific omens simply have to do with the logic of the lists. The scholarly divinatory genre with its casuistic construction demanded concrete detailed omens consisting of protases and apodoses which would apply even where no specifics were called for. In extispicy, the concrete cases functioned as illustrations of the abstract principles and provided the justification for the interpretation of a phenomenon as favourable or unfavourable. Only

FIGURE 21.3 Extispicy commentary, with an illustration of special markings on the liver: Neo-Assyrian manuscript, 7th century BC, from the library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh (British Museum, K 1315+ reverse; Koch-Westenholz 2000: no. 42). (Photo by Mikko Luukko. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

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an implicit connection to a specific context and concrete examples made such generalizations meaningful.

Third step: the actualization

When the diviner had performed an extispicy and the result was negative, there was nothing to do but to ask again. If necessary the diviner could repeat the procedure up to three times in a row (e.g. Sweek 2002: 48), but in the worst case, when the answers were consistently against one's hopes and desires, one just had to wait patiently, put the planned enterprise on hold, and not try asking the gods for their opinion again until after the stipulated term had expired (e.g. Koch 2005: no. 4, 12'). The gods did not like too much persistent questioning: 'If the diviner constantly performs extispicy: he dies the death of transgression (*arnu*)' (Zimmern 1901: no. 11, iii 18–19).

Apotropaic rituals, *namburbûs*, which mention extispicy, are quite rare. However, two different types of *namburbûs* appear to have been connected with extispicy (Koch 2010). The diviner could perform the first in order to prepare himself properly for performing extispicy—for instance, when washing his leather bag (Zimmern 1901: 112–121), which contained cultic implements such as the cedar wood, or as preparation for an important client like the king. In the early morning before an extispicy, he could perform a *namburbû* to ensure that Šamaš and Adad would stand by him in his 'verdict' that he might experience renown in extispicy and become famous thereby (Zimmern 1901: nos. 75–78). The second is the 'normal' *namburbû* type used in connection with all kinds of evil omens. Apart from *namburbûs* especially dedicated to extispicy omens, a 'universal *namburbû*' also refers to extispicy (Maul 1994: 494–496). Such *namburbûs* seem to have been performed if something prevented the proper performance of extispicy, including an extreme anomaly of the entrails. The semantic code of extispicy involved the study of tiny variations on a theme; in general serious malformations were of no relevance, or rather, they could change the whole session into something completely different. The purpose of these *namburbûs* therefore was not to counteract an unfavourable extispicy but to protect against the evil portended by technical problems connected with the performance of the divinatory ritual: for instance, if the slaughter did not work—no blood ran from the veins when the neck was cut, important organs were missing, or the organs were seriously deformed (Maul 1994: 432–438). An apotropaic amulet mentions evil stemming from 'the evil of flawed, terrifying signs, evil and unfavourable (signs) from performing the ritual, or from the lamb having a disease, or from making the sacrifice or from anything else in performance of extispicy' (Maul 1994: 185–190). I believe all this to refer to evil portended by signs observed in connection with the performance of extispicy, not the extispicy result itself. Circumstances surrounding the performance of divination were themselves observed and interpreted as ominous signs, such as the behaviour of the sacrificial animal (Jeyes 1980: 13). This resembles the way we take omens from the act of catching the bride's bouquet, something which is totally unrelated to the efficacy of the Christian marriage ritual. This then was not really an extispicy and was not interpreted as such, but rather as a sign which

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could be countered by an apotropaic ritual. Interestingly, the extispicy ritual shares one important feature with *namburbû*-rituals, namely that both are metaphorically described as judgments (e.g. Maul 1999: 126). The terminology is the same as in secular judgment: *arkata parāsu* 'investigate the circumstances', *dina dânu* 'give a verdict', and *purussâ parāsu* 'make a decision', etc. (Démare-Lafont in this volume). Similar terminology is also found in other divinatory disciplines, but most consequently and consistently in extispicy.

Conclusion

The textbooks and the theoretical frameworks of the two divinatory disciplines had the same format and were superficially very similar: highly technical, complicated compendia of omens formulated as casuistic statements. However, the way they were applied and interpreted was very different in many respects. Just as the two disciplines were complementary sources of otherwise inaccessible information, the information that was readable from celestial events had to be treated differently from what was readable in the intestines of a sacrificial lamb. When the gods sent a warning in the skies, one could act upon it and influence present and future by ritual actions or by other means, but when an individual asked the gods for their judgment one could only appeal against the verdict, but ultimately one had to accept it—at least for a time.

Further reading

A general introduction to Mesopotamian divination and magic can be found in Farber (1995) or Bottéro (1992). For the first millennium BC the online resource Radner and Robson (2007–08) provides an excellent survey with examples, illustrations, and suggested further reading. A more detailed description of the various ancient Near Eastern divination practices along with an introduction to anthropological approaches to divination and magic is given by Cryer (1994). Rochberg (2004) presents a thorough description of Mesopotamian omen astrology and horoscopy with the relevant astronomical background. The letters and reports from scholars and diviners constitute one of our most important sources. These central texts are published by Hunger (1992), Parpola (1993), and Starr (1990). Starr (1990) also contains an introduction to the technicalities of extispicy.

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CHAPTER 22

MAKING SENSE OF TIME: OBSERVATIONAL AND THEORETICAL CALENDARS

JOHN M. STEELE

What is a calendar? In its broadest terms, today the term 'calendar' is used to describe a system governing the division of time into intervals (generally days, months, and years) that can be navigated to provide a frame of reference for temporal events. It can also refer to a document (a pocket or desk diary, a wall calendar, etc.) divided into sections for each day, which can be used to record past events that took place on a specific occasion and to keep track of future appointments and provide reminders of coming holidays, birthdays, or dates when bills must be paid. But in other cultures the idea of a calendar can include different astronomical and social activities from those we are familiar with from our own calendar. For example, in ancient and medieval China the term *li* 曆, which is usually translated into English as 'calendar', encompasses not only the production of what we might think of as a calendar, but refers to a complete astronomical system for predicting astronomical events, including eclipses of the sun and moon and planetary phenomena, as well as the dates of month beginnings. Whilst a *li* provides a framework for keeping track of days it also has other uses, not the least of which is in regulating the heavens through the prediction of astronomical phenomena, reducing the number of unexpected, and therefore ominous, astronomical events (Sivin 2009: 37).

Evidence from Mesopotamia indicates that there were several different uses for the calendar. Some of the earliest cuneiform sources attest to systems for the reckoning of days for administrative and cultic purposes. Later we also find hemerologies which set out good and bad fortune days throughout the year, and astronomical almanacs which contain, amongst other things, the length of each month (including an intercalary month if needed) calculated for a coming year. But whilst we know the Akkadian for year (*šattu*), month (*arhu*), and day (*ūmu*), as well as the name for a hemerology (*uttuku*) and an almanac (*mešhī ša kašādi ša bibbī*), to my knowledge there is no Akkadian word that can be translated comfortably as 'calendar'. In what follows, therefore, I will adopt a

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broad, and at times flexible, definition of what constituted 'the calendar' in the cuneiform world.

Calendars in Mesopotamia

The calendar used throughout Mesopotamia was luni-solar. Months began on the evening when the new moon crescent could be seen for the first time and lasted for either 29 or 30 days until the next new moon crescent was seen (Figure 22.1). Twelve months made up a normal year, making a year total about 354 days. However, a solar year—the time between the return of the sun to its same place in the ecliptic, which defines the seasons—lasts a little less than $365\frac{1}{4}$days. In order to keep a calendar based upon twelve lunar months in line with the seasons it is sometimes necessary to add an extra 'intercalary' month to a year. These intercalary months, named *atru* in Akkadian (usually written with the logogram DIRI), need to be added slightly more often than once every three years in order to have a calendar that does not drift too far with respect to the seasons. Years themselves were either named for individuals, events, or other things of the king's choosing or counted sequentially from the accession year of the king.

In addition to the luni-solar calendar that operated in daily life and formed a structure for cultic activities, at certain periods a simpler calendar where each month was taken to contain 30 days was used for certain administrative purposes (Englund 1988). This administrative calendar served to simplify calculation of rations, interest payments, etc. It is worth noting that in North America a similar system was used to calculate bank interest until the 1970s (Britton 2007: 117).

FIGURE 22.1 The thin lunar crescent at its first visibility shortly after conjunction. (Photo © Steve Kluge).

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It is believed that the luni-solar calendar operated from at least the latter part of the fourth millennium BC, and quite probably earlier, down to the end of cuneiform writing (see, for example, Cohen 1993; Steele 2007). However, it must be admitted that the evidence in support of this assumption is largely circumstantial before the first millennium BC. This evidence includes statements such as that made by Rim-Sin, the ruler of Larsa, that the moon is the god 'Nanna, who establishes the months, who completes the year' (Cohen 1993: 3); festivals taking place on the days of new moon, first half crescent, and full moon during the Ur III period (Hallo 1977); the naming of the new moon as 'great crescent at (or of) the head of the month' (Hallo 1977: 6); and references to the moon as the 'crescent of the great heaven', a designation that appears frequently in texts despite the phase of the moon, and that is also reflected iconographically—the moon generally being portrayed as a crescent corresponding to the new or waxing moon (Stol 1992; Collon 1992). All of these references, and others like them, link the new moon crescent with the month, suggesting that the month began with the first sighting of the new moon. However, we do not have direct evidence for the months being truly lunar. No texts from before the first millennium describe the technical details of the calendar. Dated contracts and letters can indicate that some months had 30 days, but a document dated to the 29th day could be from the last day of a 29-day month or the second to last day of a 30-day month. Indeed, even documents dated to the 30th of a month may not necessarily imply that the month really had 30 days, as some may have been written just after sunset at the beginning of the 30th day, before the moon had been spotted and that day became the first day of a new month (see also Cohen 1993: 4).

By the first millennium BC, however, we have unambiguous evidence for the luni-solar calendar. From 7th-century BC Assyria we have a large body of correspondence sent by Assyrian and Babylonian scholars to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, a significant number of which are concerned with the watch for the new moon at the end of a month, intercalation, and other calendrical matters (Hunger 1992; Parpola 1993; Casaburi 2000–01). From the letters and reports sent by these scholars we can understand how the calendar operated in practice. At the beginning of the 30th day of the month a watch was kept for the new moon crescent. If the moon was seen an hour or so after the sunset (the beginning of the day in Mesopotamia), that day would be 'turned back' or 'rejected' (*turru*) and become the 1st day of a new month. Alternatively, if the moon was not seen that night, then the 30th day was 'completed' or 'confirmed' (*kunnu*) and the new month would begin the next day (Beaulieu 1993).

The Babylonian Astronomical Diaries and related texts (Sachs and Hunger 1988; 1989; 1996; Hunger 2001; 2006) provide extensive evidence for the operation of the luni-solar calendar from the mid-7th century BC onwards. The Astronomical Diaries routinely begin each month with a statement of whether the preceding month had 29 or 30 days and a measurement (or sometimes a calculation) of the time interval between sunset and moonset. Astronomical data from intercalary months is included as normal in those years where an intercalary month was necessary. Similar calendrical information is found in other astronomical texts.

Away from the astronomical material, evidence for 29- and 30-day months is found in a number of 6th-century BC tabular sacrifice records. These tablets contain monthly

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ledgers of the numbers of sheep and goats to be used in regular temple sacrificial offerings (Robbins 1996). Each tablet usually contains an introductory statement followed by a table divided into four columns. The first column states the day of the month and in the following columns the number of animals from different sources to be used as offerings is given. About half of the preserved examples have entries from days 1 to 29; the other half have entries for days 1 to 30 (Steele 2007: 139)—exactly as we would expect for a real luni-solar calendar.

Two objections have been raised to the assumption of the continuity of use of the luni-solar calendar through Mesopotamian history. Tanret (2004) has argued that during the Old Babylonian period the administrative calendar, which used only 30-day months, replaced the true luni-solar calendar. Tanret provides three principal pieces of evidence in support of his claim. The first is an *ikribu*-prayer which refers to the year containing 360 days and 360 nights, and hence twelve months of 30 days. However, this prayer is surely referring to the ideal calendar (see below), not the real calendar of the time. Secondly, Tanret refers to an *edubba'a* text in which a pupil states that during a month there are six vacation days and twenty-four school days. However, the text does not state that this is the case for every month of the year. Finally, Tanret discusses an administrative text which he claims shows that the month was taken to have 30 days. If this conclusion were correct (arguments against it are given by Brack-Bernsen 2007: 93), it would merely indicate a continuation of the practice of the administrative calendar, which assumes 30-day months for simplicity; it is not evidence that the everyday calendar used for cultic and other purposes did not have 29- and 30-day months.

The second objection is the question of whether the Assyrian calendar during the second millennium was purely lunar, each year being made up of twelve months with no intercalation, or whether intercalation was practised and the calendar was luni-solar. This issue has been discussed at length by several authors (e.g. Weidner 1928–29; Koch 1989; Gasche et al. 1998; Reade 2000; Veenhof 2000), without consensus.

Despite these objections, I, and most other Assyriologists, remain convinced that the luni-solar calendar formed the basis of calendrical practice throughout most of Mesopotamian history.

The 'ideal' calendar

In the fifth tablet of the Babylonian creation epic *Enūma Eliš* Marduk entrusts the night to the moon-god. Every month he is to shine forth at the beginning of the month, reach half-moon on the 7th day, full moon on the 15th, and on the 30th meet with the sun at the end of the cycle. Implicit in this account is that the lunar month lasts 30 days, and therefore twelve months make a year of 360 days. This is five or six days longer than a calendar year comprising twelve lunar months, and just over five days shorter than the length of the solar year. It has been suggested that in *Enūma Eliš* Marduk has created the ideal state of the universe at the moment of creation in which lunar months

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last 30 days, with full moon on the 15th day. Deviations from this ideal could then be interpreted ominously (Brown 2000). As a consequence, the calendar has become known as the 'ideal calendar'.

Enūma Eliš is thought to have been composed around the end of the 12th century BC (Lambert 1964) and clearly incorporates elements from earlier literary traditions, of which the ideal calendar is one example. This same calendar of twelve 30-day months making a year of 360 days is referred to in two Old Babylonian *ikribu*-prayers (De Mayer 1982; Tanret 2004). Its origins, however, must go back to the administrative calendar of the Ur III period. In this calendar, months were always taken to be 30 days long in order to ease the calculation of rations, work-rates, interest, etc. (Englund 1988). The civil calendar still operated as a real luni-solar calendar, however, and in years where the civil calendar contained an intercalary month, the administrative calendar would take this into account with a thirteenth month of 30 days, making a total of 390 days in a year.

A calendar identical in operation to the ideal calendar of *Enūma Eliš* appears in a wide range of astronomical texts from the early second millennium BC down to the end of cuneiform astronomy. The earliest example is an Old Babylonian tablet containing statements of the length of the night given in terms of the weight of water flowing through a waterclock on the dates of the solstices and equinoxes (Hunger and Pingree 1989: 163–164). Similar schemes using the same 360-day calendar are found in tablet 14 of *Enūma Anu Enlil* (Al-Rawi and George 1991–92) and in MUL.APIN (Hunger and Pingree 1989), and the calendar also appears in parts of the work *i NAM giš hur an ki a* (Livingstone 1986). In the Persian and Hellenistic periods the 360-day calendar appears in astrological texts such as the so-called *Kalendertexte*, which relate dates, positions in the zodiac, and (for example) ingredients used in medicine (Brack-Bernsen and Steele 2004).

An important question is whether the ideal calendar of *Enūma Eliš* and the 360-day calendar found in certain astronomical texts are the same. Technically, they are identical: twelve months of 30 days making up a year of 360 days. But did they share the same conceptual status? If, as Brown (2000) has argued, the calendar presented in *Enūma Eliš* is truly an 'ideal' calendar representing the perfect state of the universe, is the 360-day calendar of the early astronomical texts also 'ideal'? Brown (2000) has argued forcibly that this is the case, at least up to the Neo-Assyrian period. He proposes that the early astronomical schemes found in *Enūma Anu Enlil* tablet 14, MUL.APIN, etc., all represent the ideal state of the universe against which reality can be judged, agreement being a good omen, disagreement a bad omen. Other authors have taken a different view. For example, Brack-Bernsen (2005) suggests that the 360-day calendar of the early astronomical texts acted as a fixed grid against which the real calendar slid back and forth, and which was used to simplify calculation of astronomical phenomena by making it a two-stage process: an easy calculation using the 360-day calendar that was then adjusted to fit the real calendar. Evidence can be found that appears to offer some support to both viewpoints, without being conclusive in either case. Indeed, it may be that we are wrong to seek a unique interpretation of these calendars. They may have been used in more than one way by different (or even the same) scribes in different contexts.

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Intercalation

The insertion of an extra month into the calendar for a particular year is not only an astronomical issue but had direct consequences for civic, ritual, and everyday life. Tributes and other payments scheduled to be paid on a day in a month following the insertion of an intercalary months may have to be rescheduled to the intercalary month or accepted 29 or 30 days later than previously planned. For example, a well-known decree by the Old Babylonian king Hammurabi orders that the month that is just beginning should be designated an intercalary Month VI and as a consequence the tribute due in Babylon on the 25th of Month VII should instead be delivered on the 25th of Month VI2 (Bickerman 1980: 22). Hammurabi evidently did not want intercalation to force him to wait for the tribute. But there may also have been a practical reason: news that the king had declared an intercalary month might take some time to reach the outer parts of the empire by which time the tribute might have already been on its way.

Ritual activities could also be disrupted by the practice of intercalation. For example, the *akītu* festival held at the beginning of the new year, which acted as a crucial link between the king, the people, and the gods, legitimizing the king's rule (Pallis 1926; Bidmead 2002), might have to be effectively put off for a month if an intercalary month was added at the end of the previous year. It is unsurprising, therefore, that decisions concerning intercalation were of concern to the king and his advisors.

Evidence for intercalary months before the Late Babylonian period is very incomplete, but some peculiarities in the record can be mentioned (see Huber 1982 for lists of attested intercalations in the second millennium BC). During the reign of Ammi-ditana there is evidence for intercalary months in four consecutive years (years 25 to 28 of his rule); the same circumstance occurs again from years 32 to 35 of Hammurabi. These correspond to a shift in the beginning of the year over those four years of roughly 75 days. A shift of this magnitude would make a clear difference to the alignment of months with seasonal occurrences (annual weather patterns, length of daylight, harvesting, etc.) and we must wonder why it happened. Intercalation must have been missed for several years in order to require such dramatic correction; another possibility is that for reasons that are unknown to us it was decided to shift the dates of the solstices and equinoxes into earlier months. A similar, although considerably more gradual, deliberate shifting of the months of the solstices and equinoxes took place between the middle of the 8th and the end of the 7th centuries BC (Britton 2007: 122–124).

Rules for determining when to intercalate based upon astronomical observation are given in the early astronomical compendium MUL.APIN and related texts (Hunger and Pingree 1989; Hunger and Reiner 1975; Figure 22.2). Most of these rules determine whether intercalation is necessary by consideration of the position of the moon relative to the Pleiades on the first few days of the first month of the year. If the conjunction of the moon and the Pleiades did not occur until a particular day then the year should be made a leap year. It is not clear from the texts whether this means that the current Month

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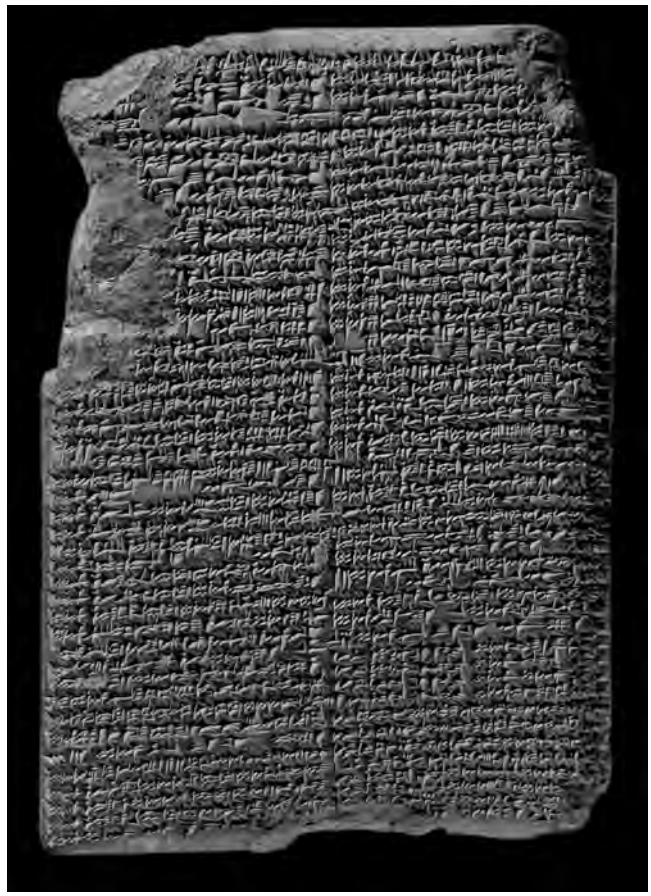

FIGURE 22.2 Late Babylonian copy of the first tablet of the series MUL.APIN (British Museum, BM 86378). (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum).

I should be changed to an intercalary Month XII of the previous year, or whether the rule indicates that twelve months later, at the end of the current year, an intercalary Month XII will be needed. It is unknown whether any of these schemes were ever used in practice, or even whether they were intended to be used (for differing opinions on this question see, for example, Brown 2000, Williams 2002).

From the middle of the 8th century BC onwards we have an almost complete record of intercalary months preserved in astronomical texts and attested in contracts and letters. These show a generally increasing regularity, with the pattern of years containing intercalary months repeating in either 8- or 19-year cycles, interspersed with occasional unexpected or delayed intercalations, some of which, at least, can be explained by periods of political instability (Britton 2007). From the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, a regular 19-year cycle of intercalations continues uninterrupted until the end of the cuneiform record. This 19-year cycle distributes seven intercalations

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within a 19-year period, all but one of which are intercalary Month XIIs. This cycle, which equates 235 lunar months with 19 solar years, was also used as a calendric cycle by Meton of Athens (Bowen and Goldstein 1988) and appears in several early Chinese calendrical systems such as the *Santongli* 三統曆 and the *Sifenli* 四分曆 (Sivin 1969). It is possible that Meton learnt of the 19-year cycle (frequently called the 'Metonic cycle' in modern scholarship) from Babylon, but its use in China illustrates that the cycle is sufficiently simple to have been identified independently.

The transition from irregular intercalation ordered by the king to an astronomically regulated system for intercalation raises interesting questions about the importance of the calendar and a possible change in the power relationship between the king and his astronomical advisors. During the Neo-Assyrian period the king retained the right to decide when to intercalate, although he was advised in this by the scholars he employed. For example, in a letter to Esarhaddon, Balasi, a very senior advisor, answers the king's query as to whether the year should contain an intercalary month saying that 'this is (indeed) a leap year' (Parpola 1993: no. 42/Parpola 1970: no. 38).

The decision as to whether to intercalate was important for the ritual calendar, and in particular for the preparations for the major festivals. In the sixth month of 671 BC, Marduk-šakin-šumi, the chief exorcist, wrote to the king after his decision to insert an intercalary Month VI asking when a festival should take place:

> [Concerni]ng the intercalation [of] the year [about which the k]ing said as follows: 'Let us add an intercalary Elul (VI)!'—the matter is (now) settled. [May the kin]g, my lord, live forever on account of that! [The king, my lo]rd, knows that Bel is dressed (for the festival) [on the 7]th of Tishri (VII); on the 8th day the gate (of the temple) is kept open, and the procession of Bel sets out as the month Nisa[n (I). The cerem]onies of the city of Der are conducted in the same way. [In fa]ct, [the king], should (now) decide what t[o d]o (with these ceremonies) [and send word] (about it). (Parpola 1993: no. 253/Parpola 1970: no. 190; see also Parpola 1983: 186–188.)

The king's answer to this question was that the festival should be carried out in the following month, and he sent instructions to this effect to his representatives throughout the empire. His agent in Babylonia, Mar-Issar, wrote back:

> As to what the king, my lord, wrote to me: 'The month Elul (VI) is intercalary; do not perform the ceremonies this month'—Ammu-salam entered Babylon on the evening of the 6th day; the god Nabû had come before him, on the 3rd. The gate was kept open before Bel and Nabû on the 4th, the 5th and the 6th, and sacrifices were performed. When I saw the king my lord's sealed order, I issued the order: the rest of the ceremonies of Elul (VI) will be performed in the coming month, as the king, my lord, wrote to me. (Parpola 1993: no. 357/Parpola 1970: no. 287; see also Parpola 1983: 284–285.)

The uncertainty in whether a festival should be performed caused by irregular intercalation was clearly a serious matter. As the empire grew, the potential for confusion would increase: orders sent by the kings to cities throughout the empire would take different lengths of time to arrive, perhaps arriving too late in some cases to prevent the festival

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from being delayed until the next month. Avoiding this problem may have been one of the reasons why intercalation cycles of 8 and 19 years were developed in the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian periods (for details of these cycles, see Britton 2007; Parker and Dubberstein 1956). Nevertheless, only the king continued to have the right to declare an intercalation. Notices sent out in the king's name proclaimed when intercalations should occur, as in the following example from the reign of Nabonidus:

> A word from the king to Kurbanni-[Marduk]: I am well, you can be happy. For your information: I have intercalated this Addar (Month XII) of the 15th year. (YOS 3 115; translation Parpola 1983: 504)

Interestingly, two similar letters from the reigns of either Cyrus or Cambyses were written by officials in the Esangila temple and do not mention the king's authority (on these letters, see Parker and Dubberstein 1956: 1–2; Parpola 1983: 504–505; Kleber 2008: 267–268). The absence of a reference to the king seems to suggest a shift in responsibility from the king to the temple, although it may be that the temple was merely the conduit through which the king chose to communicate at this time. Nevertheless, combined with the increased adherence to intercalation governed by the 19-year cycle, it is suggestive of a decline in royal control of (and interest in?) the calendar. The importance of the calendar for ritual, as well as its effect on the economy through possible changes in the dates of loan repayments and the receipt of tributes, meant that the king lost some of his discretionary power to implement intercalations which might give him short-term benefit, and placed power over these matters in the hands of the astronomical officials. In return the king received calendrical regularity, with the long-term economic benefits that provided. In addition, a regular calendar that could be predicted far in advance gave practical benefit for the preparation and performance of rituals and festivals.

The adoption of a strictly astronomically regulated calendar occurred at a time of foreign rule in Babylonia. In part this was simply due to the level to which astronomy had developed at the time. But it is tempting to ask whether a Babylonian king would have felt able to relinquish control of the calendar in the same way. I do not wish to stress this point as our understanding of the relationship between the king and astronomers during the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods is very limited, but I believe it is a question worthy of future research.

The length of the month

Most calendars that use lunar months, such as the Islamic calendar, begin the month on the evening when the thin lunar crescent can be seen for the first time. The visibility of the new moon crescent depends upon several factors, some astronomical (the elongation of the moon from the sun, lunar latitude, the angle of the ecliptic to the horizon, the time of conjunction, etc.), some not (weather conditions, pollution in the atmosphere, the eyesight of the observer, etc.). The former can be modelled, but the latter introduce an

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uncertainty into predictions of the visibility of the lunar crescent that cannot be overcome. Thus, modern methods of predicting the length of the month can only give results which will accord with observation most of the time. Whilst month lengths calculated by modern methods cannot be used to compare individual cases of preserved month lengths with computation, they can provide a good estimate of the relative proportion of months of different lengths over certain time periods. Huber (1982: 24–25) has calculated the length of every month in Babylon for the period from 2457 BC to AD 212 and found that only three types of months occur: 29-day (46.9%), 30-day (53.1%), and 31-day months (<0.1%).

No examples of 31-day months are known from Mesopotamia and so it seems that the beginning of the month was not strictly governed by the visibility of the moon, but through a rule that can be expressed as follows: if the lunar crescent is seen on the evening at the beginning of the 30th day, that day would be 'turned back' or 'rejected' (*turru*) and become instead the 1st day of the new month; otherwise that day would be 'completed' or 'confirmed' (*kunnu*) as the 30th day and the next evening would mark the beginning of the 1st of the new month (Britton 2007; Steele 2007; Beaulieu 1993). In other words, the beginning of the month is determined purely by whether the new moon crescent is visible on the 30th.

Weather will sometimes prevent the moon being seen for several days and, at least during the Neo-Assyrian period, it seems that in these cases the decision of whether to begin the new month on a certain day was made by the king on the advice of his scholars. A letter sent by Adad-šumu-uṣur to Assurbanipal provides a nice example of this situation. He writes that the moon was too high in the sky on the evening when it was first seen and advises the king that he should check with reports from elsewhere before deciding whether the month in fact began a day earlier:

> I observed the (crescent of the) moon on the 30th day, but it was high, too high to be (the crescent) of the 30th. Its position was like that of the 2nd day. If it is acceptable to the king, my lord, let the king wait for the report of the Inner City (i.e. Assur) before fixing the date. (Parpola 1993: no. 225).

A large number of letters and reports sent by scholars to the Neo-Assyrian kings deal with the first sighting of the new moon crescent. Some indicate that attempts were made to try to predict the day of crescent visibility in advance, though it appears that these were as a guide for when to watch, or as a reserve measure in case of bad weather, and that observation remained the norm.

By the beginning of the 6th century BC in Babylonia, very effective techniques had been developed for predicting the beginning of the month. These methods mainly utilized six time intervals recorded every month, named by Sachs (1948) the 'lunar six'. The most important of these intervals is the time between sunset and moonset on the first day of the month (called NA). Four intervals between sunrise/set and moonrise/set on days around full moon (called ŠÚ, NA, ME, and GE_6) and the time between moonrise and sunrise on the night when the moon is seen for the last time during the month (called KUR) complete the lunar six. Regular observations of the lunar six began by at

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least 643 BC in Babylon and continued to be made until the end of cuneiform astronomy (Huber and Steele 2007).

By around 600 BC a simple but elegant and extremely effective method of predicting the lunar six using observations made 18 and $18\frac{1}{2}$ years earlier was being used to fill in the observational record where bad weather had prevented an observation being made (Huber and Steele 2007; Huber and Britton 2007). The method, discovered by Brack-Bernsen (1999), is fully described in the 3rd- or 2nd-century BC tablet from Uruk, TU 11 (Brack-Bernsen and Hunger 2002); partial accounts of it are also preserved on earlier tablets from Babylon (Brack-Bernsen 2002). Several sections of TU 11 explain how this method can also be used to predict the length of the month. For example, section 18 stipulates that if the NA you calculated for the first day of the month is greater than 12 UŠ then the moon will be visible and the new month begins. However, if the NA is less than 12 UŠ, the moon will not be seen until the next day. A revised NA for this next day can now be calculated and this day will be the first day of the month.

Reports of the length of the month are regularly given in Late Babylonian astronomical texts (Figure 22.3). These accounts are usually very formulaic: at the beginning of the entry for a particular month will be written '30' or '1' to indicate whether the previous month had 29 or 30 days—'30' meaning that the previous month had 29 days, '1' indicating that it had 30 days (Sachs and Hunger 1988: 20)—followed by a measurement of the lunar six interval NA and any remarks on the appearance of the moon or weather affecting its sighting. If the moon could not be seen because of bad weather, a calculated NA value was given.

There are several examples of the month beginning after a 29-day month even though the moon had not been seen because of the weather. The earliest example of this comes from the Astronomical Diary for 374 BC:

FIGURE 22.3 Late Babylonian collection of month lengths and related data (BM 40277). (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum).

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> [Month] VIII, (the 1st of which was identical with) the 30th (of the preceding month); sunset to moonset: 10° 30′; mist, I did not see the moon. (Sachs and Hunger 1988: no. -373B)

Because of the mist the moon could not be seen on the 30th evening of Month VII, but the new month began anyway. This implies that the decision to begin the new month must have been made based on a prediction of the visibility of the moon. In other words, sometimes the date of the beginning of a month was determined purely on the bases of advance prediction, not on observation. Indeed, I have argued (Steele 2007) that during the Seleucid period at least, and quite possibly earlier, the beginnings of the months were normally determined in advance using calculation and not based upon observing the moon. Strong evidence for this opinion comes from comparison of Astronomical Diaries (the contemporary observational accounts which preserve information on the calendar in use) and related texts, with the normal star almanacs and almanacs, which contain predicted astronomical data for a coming year. Overlapping texts show almost complete agreement between the predicted month lengths given in the almanacs and normal star almanacs and the month lengths given in the Astronomical Diaries and related texts. Stern (2008) has argued against my interpretation and believes instead that the day of the beginning of the month was sometimes based upon observation and sometimes on calculation. I do not find his reasons for rejecting my arguments, which are based upon his statistical analysis of the discrepancies between the dates of lunar crescent visibility and modern computation, convincing.

As with intercalation, notice of the beginning of the month seems to have been sent out from the major cities and cult centres to smaller towns. Two letters are known that refer to communication of this information during the Neo-Babylonian period, one a request for information concerning the beginning of the month sent to the governor of Sippar, the other a letter from an individual in Larsa to the Eanna temple at Uruk noting that he has received the report from Uruk that the previous month had only 29 days (Beaulieu 1993). Once more, the time taken for communication between cities and the importance of practising ritual activities on the correct day simultaneously throughout the empire, may have contributed to the development and acceptance of a predicted calendar that could be produced a year in advance.

Conclusions

Several different calendars in Mesopotamia have been, or could be, called 'ideal' calendars. Those calendars which have generally been given this name are the 360-day calendar of *Enūma Eliš*, which perhaps represents a vision of the ideal state of the universe at creation, and the 360-day calendar found in some astronomical and astrological texts, which may or may not be conceptually the same as the calendar of *Enūma Eliš*. But we

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can also add the calendar governed by astronomical calculation adopted in the middle of the first millennium BC. This calendar is 'ideal' in a different way from the 360-day calendars. It is not an unobtainable ideal of perfection used either to judge reality against or to simplify calculation, but aims to remove the uncertainties of an observationally based calendar and replace them with regularity. It seeks, in effect, a practical ideal rather than a philosophical or cosmological one.

In making the transition from an observationally based calendar to one governed by astronomical theory the king and his government placed their trust in the expert knowledge of a small group of specialists. These individuals in return provided Babylonia with the means to ensure that all of its towns and cities operated with the same calendar, harmonizing the performance of ritual throughout the country and making it easier for traders, diplomats, and governors to plan future budgets and actions.

This change in the relationship between the 'ideal' (represented by astronomical theory) and 'reality' (represented by observation), privileging the former over the latter, extended also into two other areas of astronomy. First, connected directly with the calendar are the dates of the solstices and equinoxes and the first visibility, acronychal rising, and last visibility of Sirius. Reports of these phenomena in the Astronomical Diaries from around 320 BC onwards give dates derived from a simple mathematical scheme derived from the 19-year intercalation cycle (Neugebauer 1975: 357–363; Sachs 1952; Sachs and Hunger 1988: 26–27). Occasionally these reports are accompanied by a remark that the phenomena had been observed on a slightly different day, but normally they are simply given without comment, presumably indicating that no observation was made. The same dates for these phenomena are given in the Almanacs and Normal Star Almanacs which contain predicted astronomical data for a coming year.

Secondly, reports of observations of the first (and occasionally last) appearance of a planet often give two dates: the first the date on which the phenomenon was observed, the second an 'ideal' date upon which the planet should have been observed if the weather or the observer's eyesight had been better, probably determined from a measurement of the length of time the planet remained visible on the night of the observation (if this time was too great it implied that the planet should have been seen one or more days earlier). Interestingly, if the observed and ideal dates are given for the first visibility of the planet in the main body of an Astronomical Diary, generally in the end of month summaries the date given for the same phenomenon is the ideal date and it was this date that would be utilized in making predictions of future phenomena (Gray and Steele 2008). Huber (1977) has argued that where only one date is given for the first visibility of a planet in the Astronomical Diaries it is the ideal date.

The relationship between different aspects of Babylonian astronomy is at present only imperfectly understood, especially with regard to questions such as the interplay between observation and theory and the status and authority of different methods of astronomical prediction that were in use at the same time. Active research in these areas is under way and the answers to these questions will be of major importance to understanding the nature and purpose of Babylonian astronomy.

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Further reading

Many of the issues surrounding the various calendars of Mesopotamia are discussed in greater detail in Cohen (1993), Brown (2000), Britton (2007), and Steele (2007). The Late Babylonian calendar is discussed in Parker and Dubberstein (1956), which also includes tables for converting between Babylonian and Julian dates. Unfortunately, an up-to-date introductory book on Babylonian and Assyrian astronomy has not yet been written. Brief accounts may be found in Britton and Walker (1996) and Steele (2008: 19–65).

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CHAPTER 23

LETTERS AS CORRESPONDENCE, LETTERS AS LITERATURE

FABIENNE HUBER VULLIET

The Sumerian epic *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* gives an aetiological explanation of the invention of letter-writing (Vanstiphout 2004; Mittermayer 2009; ETCSL 1.8.2.3). It tells how the ruler Enmerkar, 'lord of Kulaba', wanted to send a long and complicated message to the ruler of the distant kingdom of Aratta in Iran:

> His speech was substantial, and its contents extensive. The messenger, whose mouth was heavy, was not able to repeat it. Because the messenger, whose mouth was tired, was not able to repeat it, the lord of Kulaba patted some clay and wrote the message as if on a tablet. Formerly, the writing of messages on clay was not established. Now, under that sun and on that day, it was indeed so. The lord of Kulaba inscribed the message like a tablet. It was just like that. (ETCSL 1.8.2.3, ll. 500–506)

Even though Enmerkar's skilful messenger had managed to deliver previous messages between the two rulers by memory and repetition, they had failed to achieve the expected effect—the submission of the lord of Aratta. Now, by increasing his demands on the enemy, Enmerkar was overstretching his faithful messenger's powers of recall. But, the epic tells us, the new technology had a powerful effect:

> The lord of Aratta received his kiln-fired tablet from the messenger. The lord of Aratta looked at the tablet. The transmitted message was just nails (i.e. the wedge-shaped impressions of the cuneiform script), and his brow expressed anger. The lord of Aratta looked at his kiln-fired tablet. At that moment, the lord worthy of the crown of lordship, the son of god Enlil, the god Iškur, thundering in heaven and earth, caused a raging storm, a great lion, in . . . He was making the mountains quake . . . , he was convulsing the mountain range . . . ; the awesome radiance . . . of his breast; he caused the mountain range to raise its voice in joy. (ETCSL 1.8.2.3, ll. 537–548)

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The poet emphasizes the symbolism of this passage by playing with the meanings of the cuneiform sign IM, which can be read as *im* 'clay', *tumu* 'storm', and *Iškur*, the name of the storm-god, who began to rage as the lord of Aratta looked at the tablet. Clearly, the message had divine support. Thus cuneiform culture saw letter-writing as a way to communicate across long distances, which ensured that communication between sender and addressee was as unambiguous as possible.

As well as letters written between real people for everyday purposes of communication—which we will call archival letters—there are many which are clearly literary. That is, the sender and/or addressee may be mythical, divine, or fictive; and the vocabulary and language used in them are often far removed from the mundane diction of administrative and family letters. By exploring the complex relationship between archival and literary letters in cuneiform culture we hope to find new ways of understanding them. As relatively few literary letters in the Akkadian language have survived, we will focus on the Sumerian corpus.

Archival letters

The first evidence of archival letters goes back to around 2350 BC. For understandable practical reasons—the tablets had to be transported—they were usually small and their contents accordingly concise (Figure 23.1).

FIGURE 23.1 Archival letter from the Ur III period, ordering the delivery of some wool (BM 27382; (ed. Sollberger 1966: no. 85). (Photos by Frans van Koppen. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

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From the beginning, they shared a common structure: address; message; closure. However, instead of featuring the most prevalent worldwide pattern of epistolary discourse, the two-participant 'I to you', Sumerian archival letters from the third millennium BC display the pattern 'I (sender)—you (messenger)—he (addressee)'. Sumerian-speaking people thus had a distinctive way of expressing the idea of long-distance communication.

The address was almost always written as: 'to PN_2 (addressee) after you have said to him, (this is) what PN_1 (addresser) says' (Kienast and Volk 1995). The 'you' here is the messenger. The temporal separation in the communication process is underlined by the past tense, 'after you have said'. On the other hand the much discussed phrase, '(this is) what PN_1 says', anticipates the completion of the communication process by referring to the sender in the third person (he/she) in the present tense. The third person tells us that the message will be transmitted in the absence of the sender. The present tense refers both to the 'here and now', when the sender was dictating the letter, as well as the 'there and now', when the messenger was to start reading it to the addressee. This form of address was so commonly used that the Sumerian verbal form 'after you have said to him', u_3-na-du_{11}, also came to mean the noun 'letter' and was borrowed into Akkadian as *unnedukkum*.

In the message and the closure, by contrast, the sender refers to himself in the first person (I/me), while the addressee always appears in the third person singular (he/she). The I—he/she pairing underlines the distance between the sender and the addressee and implies the participation of the messenger (an unspoken 'you') in the communication process. The closure was optional. It could exhort the addressee ('It is urgent!'), express a wish ('It must not come up again') or ask a rhetorical question ('Who is like my brother?').

Significantly, the older Akkadian letters share the same structural conventions although the addressee tends to be referred to in the second person, 'you' (Sallaberger 1999: 4–5, 53). Thus, from the very beginning of our textual evidence, a standard epistolary discourse is attested. Indeed, given its structure, and its use of specific ways of referring to the sender and addressee, and to time and space, the Mesopotamian archival letter can be considered as a distinct genre of text.

In the third millennium both Sumerian and Akkadian archival letters tended to be concise. The address formulas could be omitted or put into reverse order. The phrase '(this is) what (the sender) says' could be substituted with an impression of his or her seal. Normally the main message concerned administrative matters, couched in typically administrative language. Noun clauses and relative clauses as well as the anticipatory genitive were favoured. A previous communication between the sender, addressee, and/or another protagonist could be quoted directly. As a rule, these quotes are in the first or the second person ('I' or 'you'), and are followed by the phrase 'I said' or 'he said'. The Sumerian connector 'and' was only used sporadically. But from the early second millennium onwards, Akkadian letters used connecting words such as 'secondly' and 'further' in order to structure the message. The closing formulas were optional and, if the sender had to transmit more than one piece of information, could also be inserted into the core of the

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message. Apart from the address formulas, the syntax (word order) was not specific to letter-writing, but drew especially from the phraseology of legal documents. On the whole, the language of archival letters differed significantly from literary prose.

Here are some examples which illustrate the principles of letter writing:

> To my king, after you have said, (this is) what Iliš-takal says. 'Give me the two-wheeled chariot!' I told him, but he did not give it to me. Because he was away, this is what my man has seen: there is a two-wheeled chariot in Kibabar, in the house of Bazizi. After I have dispatched his (i.e., the king's) messenger, he should give it to me. Come on, I am his reliable servant, surely he can rejoice my heart! Therefore may this inscribed tablet be before his eyes, so that he may hear how it is, and I will also rejoice his heart. (Michalowski 1993: no. 30, Sumerian language, Sargonic period, 2334–2154 BC)
>
> Thus Iškun-Dagan to Puzur-Eštar. You must take the oath by Inana and Ilaba, by Ašgi and Ninhursag, by the life of the king and the life of the queen: until you meet me, you will take neither bread nor beer, and until *you* not . . . , you will not sit down in a chair. (Michalowski 1993: no. 21, Akkadian language, Sargonic period)
>
> To Atanah, after you have said. The employees of Lubi, after they have *straddled* the boat: he should give them to Girinigu. It is urgent! May he be quickly at my service! (Sollberger 1966: no. 32, Sumerian language, Ur III period, 2112–2004 BC)
>
> Say to Enlil-isa: give 360 litres of dates to Nur-Adad! It is urgent! Do not go against him! (Michalowski 1993: no. 206, Akkadian language, Ur III period)

Scribes must have had to learn these letter-writing conventions in order to communicate efficiently, but such training exercises are attested only in Akkadian and from the early second millennium onwards (Kraus 1959; Sallaberger 1999). While concrete evidence is scarce, letter-writing conventions seem to have been studied at an elementary curricular level, at least in the city of Kiš (Hallo 1968: 76; Ohgama and Robson 2010: 224–225). We have not yet recognized such exercises among the corpus of Sumerian archival letters.

Even if scribes could easily learn the address and closing formulas by heart, they also had to master administrative language almost perfectly in order to ensure efficient communication. However, within these conventional constraints scribes could also use, omit, or invert most of the formulas. Right from the earliest surviving examples the discourse of archival letters shows a great deal of flexibility.

Literary letters

By the middle of the Old Babylonian period at the latest, around 1850 BC, all administrative and business letters were written in Akkadian. The Sumerian language was no longer spoken, although still intensively studied in scribal schools and perhaps still actively used by some scholars (Edzard 2005; Rubio 2006). Among the numerous Sumerian

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literary works copied, over fifty 'literary letters' are known. As a rule, these 'literary letters' are preserved in more than one copy, most of which date from the Old Babylonian period. Although we may yet identify new literary letters, either in manuscript form or as mentioned in ancient catalogues (see below), it seems that the corpus was quite limited.

Three sub-genres of literary letters can be distinguished. However, we should use this modern categorization with caution, considering how little is known about the context and purpose of the letters' composition. The first category are private letters which deal with various private or business matters, are mostly short and of little literary interest. The second category are petitions, or 'letter-prayers', to a deity, ruler, or another member of a royal family which are composed in a much more elaborate style that clearly deserves the epithet 'literary'. The third category is official correspondence between rulers and/or senior administrative officials. This last sub-genre includes letters to and from the rulers of the Third Dynasty of Ur (2112–2004 BC)—the so-called Royal Correspondence of Ur (here abbreviated as RCU)—as well as to and from members of the Isin and Larsa dynasties (2017–1763 BC). Some of these letters are written in an elevated style that can seem inappropriate for an official letter.

So what about ancient categories? On a clay tablet containing four literary letters to and from Ibbi-Suen, king of Ur (r. 2028–2004 BC), the scribe sums them up in the colophon as [4 lu]gal-ĝu$_{10}$-ra, literally 'four (letters) to my king' (Michalowski 1980–83: 52). This suggests that lugal-ĝu$_{10}$-ra served as a technical term for literary royal correspondence. But beyond the designation lugal-ĝu$_{10}$-ra for the royal literary letters and the more general label u$_3$-na-a-(a)-du$_{11}$, simply meaning 'letter', we lack evidence of any more specific designations, especially one corresponding to the petitions or 'letter-prayers'. Petitions to rulers may well have belonged to the lugal-ĝu$_{10}$-ra category.

In the petitions or 'letter-prayers', the opening address is developed into a three-part formula which also includes praise to the addressee: 'after you have said to him'—praise—'after you have added to him'—'(this is) what he says'. The sender of a letter-prayer could be an individual or a king, as in this well-known letter from Sin-iddinam, ruler of Larsa (r. 1849–1843 BC) to the sun-god Utu which was copied until the Neo-Assyrian period, in the 7th century BC, when it was augmented with an Akkadian translation (Hallo 1982):

> To Utu, my king, lord, senior judge of heaven and earth, protector of the nations, who renders verdicts, righteous god who loves to pardon men, who hears prayer, long on mercy, who knows clemency, loving justice, choosing righteousness, [destroying] evil (?), **after you have said** to the bearded son of (the goddess) Ningal, (who) wears a greenish lapis lazuli beard, opener of the courtyard (and) locks of heaven and earth, who makes dark (places) bright, lord who alone is a resplendent leader, whose greatness is unequalled, warrior, son born by Ningal, who guards and gathers together the divine attributes, righteous god, prince who determines all fates, father of the black-headed ones, my king, **after you have added**!
>
> **This is what** Sin-iddinam, king of Larsa, your servant, **says**. (Hallo 1982: 96–99)

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The following letter-prayer adds an unusual self-praise after the 'after you have added' formula:

> To my king, **after you have said**, to my mountain goat (with) good limbs, my mountain donkey (with) eagle's claw, to my palm-tree (which) grew for the pure ground, bearing lapis lazuli dates, **after you have added**.
>
> **This is what** Aba'indasa, overseer of the elite troops, the one who, thanks to the prayers for his king, comforts the king's heart, your servant, **says**. (Ali 1964: Letter Collection B no. 1 = ETCSL 3.1.21, ll. 1–8)

As this example shows, the address section of the petitions, as well as of other literary letters, introduces the relationship I—you ('what **your** servant says'). The messenger's function as the third participant is thus overshadowed.

As a rule, the core of the message consists of a description of the sender's current unhappy condition, although its contents can be highly variable in length and level of detail. The petition's closing section more or less elaborately requests the addressee to restore the sender to his former position:

> May my king ask after me and may I return to my position of superiority. (Letter of Lugal-nesage to a king: Ali 1964: Letter Collection B no. 7 = ETCSL 3.3.02, l. 24)
>
> If it pleases my lady, may the *asag* demon which is in my body leave my body, so that I can step again on the path ground of life with my feet. (Letter of Inanaka to Nintinuga: Böck 1996 = ETSCL 3.3.10, ll. 19–21)

Most literary 'official' correspondence, on the other hand, has a simple address section ('To my king after you have said, [this is] what PN says'), but a hymnic verse is occasionally introduced between the 'this is what PN says' formula and the message:

> To my king, after you have said, (this is) what Urdugu, your servant, says. Your word is a word of heaven that cannot be changed, your fate, as of a god, is <in> your hands. (Michalowski 1976: 177–182: Royal Correspondence of Ur no. 6 = ETCSL 3.1.06, ll. 1–4)

Since the core of the message was usually the place for information and thus for narrative variation, some letters of the royal correspondence contain highly literary passages.

> Of the people of Šulgi, numerous as grass, . . . their shepherd with a firm . . . , You are the god of the multitude above and below. Their eyes are directed at you. (Michalowski 1976: 172–176: Royal Correspondence of Ur no. 5 = ETCSL 3.1.04, ll. 5–7)
>
> As to their men and women: *its* man goes to the place of his heart, *its* woman is holding the spindle and the hair clasp in her hand, (and) goes (in accordance with) the path of her heart, in the vast spaces of the steppe, they have installed the cattle pens. After they set up their tents and camps, their workers and labourers spend the day together on the fields. (Michalowski 1976: 160–166: Royal Correspondence of Ur no. 3 = ETCSL 3.1.11, ll. 3–8; Figure 23.2)

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These two excerpts were inserted into reports on the political situation in the peripheral areas of the Ur III state. It is as if literary discourse were the only appropriate way of describing distant lands and unknown populations, as in royal inscriptions. However, this poetic diction is totally alien to normal epistolary discourse, in which the expectation is that the sender has directly witnessed the situations and events on which he reports. In our examples, by contrast, descriptions are no longer linked to the 'here and now' of the writer and the first person 'I' is completely absent.

Unlike archival letters, literary letters always contain closing formulas. Further exhortations could be added to the usual phrases:

> My king, no other king equals you. May your heart be favourable to this! (Michalowski 1976: 160–166: Royal Correspondence of Ur no. 3 = ETCSL 3.1.11: 20; Figure 23.2)
>
> My king must not neglect them. It is urgent! (Ali 1964: Letter Collection B no. 4 = ETCSL 3.2.03, ll. 18–19; Figures 23.3 a–b)

The final sub-genre of the so-called literary letters comprises those of administrative content. We do not know why they were incorporated into the corpus. In the following

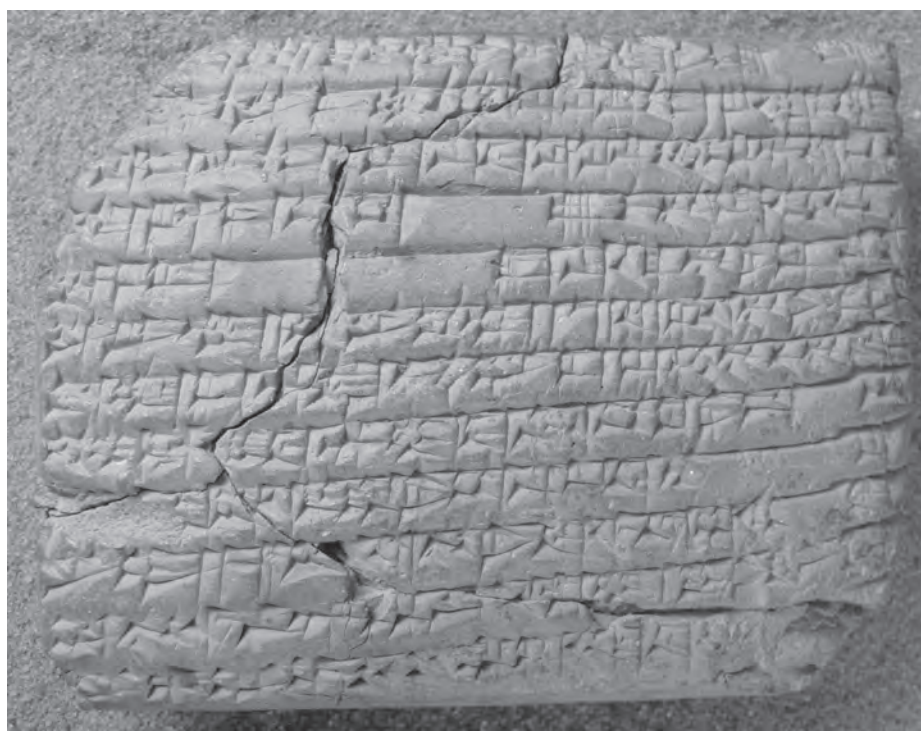

FIGURE 23.2 Old Babylonian manuscript of a letter from the Royal Correspondence of Ur (no. 3 = ETCSL 3.1.11; BM 108869). (Photos by Frans van Koppen. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

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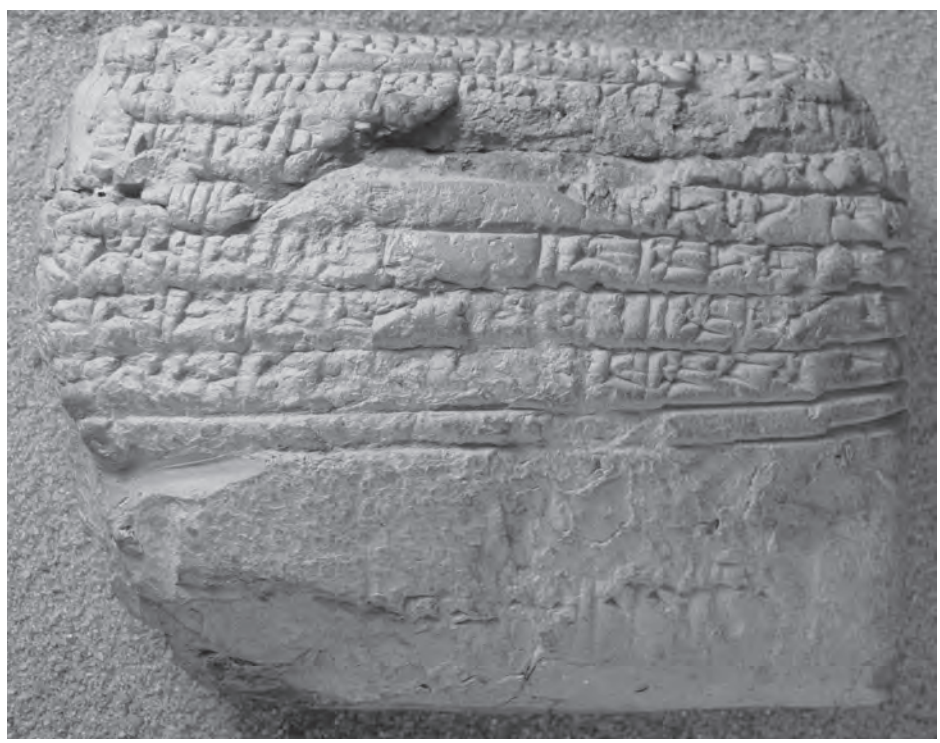
letter, the variations between the two duplicates (A and B) show that here, as in other types of literary letters, the scribe could take a degree of liberty with the core of the message, as well as with the choice of closure formula.

(AB) To Nur-kabta, after you have said,
(AB) (this is) what Saglugalbizu says.
(AB) You, the zabar-dab$_5$ official and the chief-singer,
(AB) catch (*plural*) together Ku-Ninlila at the Abullamah-gate!
(B) In order to return the field, Ur-Suena . . . my king (or a PN . . . -lugalĝu) will accept the bailiff's charge.
(AB) If you are my brothers from the bottom of your firm heart,
(AB) you (*singular*) will say nothing to the man about my case,
(AB) because of his case (which is) to be discussed before your (*singular*) eyes.
(AB) Do not neglect the man I have sent to you (*singular*)!
(A) It is urgent! (Saglugalbizu to Nur-kabta; Michalowski 1978: 115 = ETCSL 3.3.16)

Like literary letters, the message from Saglugalbizu refers to the addressee in the second person, as Akkadian archival letters do. Therefore the messenger could only be referred to in the third person and his role had to be explicitly mentioned: 'Do not neglect the man I have sent you!' In spite of its concision, the letter from Saglugalbizu shares with other literary correspondence a tendency to digress from the main message. It also adds a variant to the closure formula.



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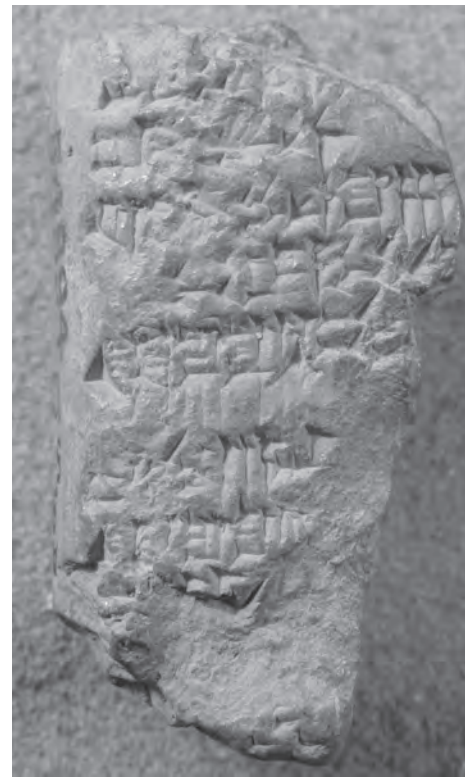
(a)



(b)

FIGURE 23.3 Two Old Babylonian manuscripts with extracts of a literary letter to king Lipit-Eštar of Isin (r. 1934–1924 BC) ((a) BM 54894 reverse. (b) BM 79102, obverse; ed. Ali 1964: Letter Collection B no. 4 = ETCSL 3.2.03). (Photos by Frans van Koppen. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

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The historical background of this letter is not known, assuming that it was something more than an Old Babylonian school exercise. The Sumerian name Saglugalbizu (literally 'your of the head, its king') is in itself suspicious. It was probably a warped attempt at translating the Akkadian official title *ša rēš šarri* 'king's representative' instead of simply using the well-attested Sumerian equivalent, saĝ-lugal. However, as the pronoun 'your' (the suffix -zu) looks like the 'your' in the common address formula 'thus says PN, your servant', the writer may have meant 'thus says your Saglugalbi'. Such variations and puns on names are well attested in the corpus of literary letters. For instance, in one such letter (Ali 1964: Letter Collection B no. 11 = ETCSL 3.3.05) the topic of the message was the division of fields. The version from the city of Nippur locates them in a place named Dabta, whereas the version from Ur in a place called in Sumerian me-am$_3^{ki}$, which literally means 'where is it?'. In another text (Ali 1964: Letter Collection B no. 4 = ETCSL 3.2.03; see Figure 23.3), the author has fun with the supposedly Elamite name Attamannum, which in Akkadian means 'whoever you are'.

Another novel feature in the Sumerian literary letters was the use of commands to the addressee instead of, or along with, wishes in the third person. For instance:

> My king has become distressed about the battles in Elam. But its (Elam's) grain rations have quickly been exhausted, so do not waste your strength! Do not give your word (to be) in its slavery, do not be on its heels! (Michalowski 1976: 243–251; Royal Correspondence of Ur no. 19 = ETCSL 3.1.17, ll. 24–28)

To sum up: the structure of literary letters was much more set than that of archival letters. The address formulas were never reversed or shortened, nor were the closure formulas omitted. The variations between manuscripts of individual letters occur outside the epistolary formulas, and within the stock phrases of the closure. Beyond, or maybe because of, their fixed epistolary structure, they show a great deal of narrative potential. The literary letters often add digressions which emphasize the spatial or symbolic distance between the sender and the addressee.

The letter-prayers in particular can be seen as an extension of long-distance communication. The typical 'after you have added' formula creates the same three-participant relationship as archival letters, although here, the address and the hymnic section introduce the I—you relationship. One may argue that the messenger's role in the communication process was merely symbolic, but as almost all literary letters use the second person it seems that the pattern I (addresser)—you (addressee)—he (messenger) reliably distinguishes Sumerian literary letters from their archival counterparts.

Literary letters in the scribal curriculum

We learn from the provenance of the numerous manuscripts of Sumerian literary letters that they were studied in many Old Babylonian scribal schools of the cuneiform cultural area and, later in the second millennium, even as far as Susa in Iran, Hattusa in Anatolia

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and Ugarit in Syria (Nougayrol 1968: 23–28; Krecher 1969: 141, 152–154). By this time, as we have already said, the Sumerian language was no longer spoken yet it remained the linguistic backbone of the scribal curriculum which, especially for students of the later and peripheral schools, probably added an additional challenge to scribal apprenticeship.

Literary letters are listed in two Old Babylonian catalogues of curricular compositions, and the majority are also known in manuscript. To judge from the rulers' names in these catalogues, as well as on the known archaeological context of the tablets, the letters were not studied before the 19th century BC (Huber 2001: 205–206). Their position within one catalogue suggests they belonged to the secondary phase of scribal education. This catalogue, of unknown provenance, lists:

> Ten letters of Šulgi.
> 'To Sin, the king, the exalted crescent moon, after you have said.'
> 'To Sumu-la'el, my king, after you have said.'
> (Cohen 1976: 131–132, ll. 25–27)

If this catalogue lists a curricular order and not, for instance, a shelving system, the ten letters to or from Šulgi, king of Ur (r. 2094–2047 BC), the petition to the moon-god Sin, and the letter to Sumu-la'el, king of Babylon (r. 1880–1845 BC), were studied after mythological and hymnic compositions, just after didactic compositions and instructional texts (listed in ll. 19–24) and before a collection of proverbs (l. 30).

The other catalogue, found in the city of Uruk, contains almost exclusively the first lines of literary letters, organized by the name of the sender and/or the addressee (Cavigneaux 1996: 57–58). As in the other catalogue, the royal correspondence seems to be arranged chronologically but no other logical classification—for instance, distinguishing between private letters and petitions—can be identified.

As far as we know, literary letters were not studied alongside administrative and juridical documents. Even if they clearly belong to scribal training in Sumerian literature, given their absence from most ancient catalogues of literary works—about a dozen of which survive—it does not appear that their study was a prerequisite of scribal apprenticeship. To try to understand why these letters were copied, we must first find out how they were copied.

The literary letters were copied individually or grouped on large clay tablets, the so-called 'Sammeltafeln', or collective tablets (Figure 23.4). In addition to the twenty-two letters of the already mentioned corpus today called the Royal Correspondence of Ur (abbreviated here as RCU; editions: Michalowski 1976; 2011), there is a fairly stable but heterogeneous corpus known today as Letter Collection B (abbreviated here as LCB; edition: Ali 1964) comprising seventeen literary letters and three very short 'historical' works whose setting was mostly Old Babylonian.

The entire Letter Collection B is attested on a large tablet from Nippur (UM 29–16–139+, kept at Philadelphia), which must also have contained one or more additional letters. Some other, now broken, tablets might have held the whole collection too. As for smaller tablets, we see that many of the texts, however they are grouped, were copied in the same order as on the Nippur tablet. For instance, LCB 18 (= ETCSL 5.7.2, a

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FIGURE 23.4 Poorly preserved Old Babylonian collective tablet from Sippar, containing four letters of the Royal Correspondence of Ur (nos. 1, 2, 18, and 21 = ETCSL 3.1.01, 02, 16, and 19; BM 55327+55345). (Photo by Frans van Koppen. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

non-epistolary dedication to the goddess Nintinuga) and one line of LCB 19 (= ETCSL 3.3.11, a letter of Inim-Inana) are inscribed on another completely preserved tablet from Nippur (3N-T292), while yet another Nippur tablet (Ni 13225, kept at Philadelphia) bears two petitions from Lugal-nesage to a king (LCB 7 = ETCSL 3.3.02; LCB 8 = ETCSL 3.3.03). Thus Letter Collection B seems to have been much more standardized than the Royal Correspondence of Ur, its constituent texts copied in a logical, partly thematic order.

The best example may be a complete tablet from Nippur (CBS 13968, kept at Philadelphia) which contains three compositions in the following standard order:

- Letter from Ur-Enlila to a governor and temple administrator (LCB 10 = ETCSL 3.3.04)
- Letter from a governor and temple administrator to a king (LCB 11 = ETCSL 3.3.05)
- (Non-epistolary) official announcement of a lost sealed tablet (LCB 12 = ETCSL 5.7.a)

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In the non-epistolary text, one of the witnesses of the procedure described is Lugal-melim, who held the offices of governor and temple administrator. At first sight, its historical background would seem to be much earlier than that of the literary letters. A man called Lugal-melim was a governor of Nippur (Frayne 1997: 279–281, nos. 2003, 2004) under king Amar-Suen of Ur (r. 2046–2038 BC), although he is not known to have been a temple administrator. However, as Lugal-melim was a very common Sumerian name, this may simply be coincidence. The names of the other protagonists in the non-epistolary texts are not uncommon either, but it is striking that the names should match the individuals' profession so aptly: there is a schoolmaster named Zuzu ('The one who knows'), a scribe Sidu (possibly 'The one who inscribes with a horn stylus') and a cult singer Bansagen ('He made me beautiful').

Lugal-melim's joint appointment as governor and administrator seems to have been a problem for the student copyists, who confused the plural and the singular in the address as if there were two senders:

> To the governor (and) temple administrator after you have said, (this is) what Ur-Enlila says to him. (LCB 10 = ETCSL 3.3.04: 1–2)
>
> To **our** king after you have said, what the governor (and the) temple administrator says. (LCB 11 = ETCSL 3.3.05: 1–2)

An emphasis on names is also found in the variants to line 4 of the first letter (LCB 10), where the personal name is written variously as ^{d}en-lil$_2$-diĝir-ĝu$_{10}$ 'Enlil is my god' (which could also be read ^{d}en-lil$_2$-an-ĝu$_{10}$ 'Enlil is my sky'), ^{d}en-lil$_2$-a$_2$-ĝu$_{10}$ 'Enlil is my arm/strength' and ^{d}en-lil$_2$-la$_2$-ĝu$_{10}$ 'My Enlil'. These names all had the same pronunciation but different meanings.

We have already seen that the Ur version of the second letter (LCB 11) features the humorous place name 'Where is that?', suggestive of a school exercise. Furthermore, the core message in this letter about the sharing of fields also has didactic features. The total area was 3240 *iku* (*c.* 12 km^2), from which 540 *iku* (*c.* 2 km^2, with a variant 54 *iku*) had to be subtracted along with an additional claim for 18 *iku* from two individuals. As all of these numbers are round and easy to calculate, it seems that the students were given a simple mathematical problem to solve, as is also the case in a letter from the Royal Correspondence of Ur (RCU 19 = ETCSL 3.1.17; see Robson 2002: 351).

Training in letter-writing also served the purpose of introducing short hymn-like compositions into epistolary prose. For instance, the two petitions to a king (LCB 7 and 8), which were often copied together, make up two complementary variants of a letter-prayer. The first is addressed to 'a king radiant as the moon', the second to 'a king radiant as the sun'. These two letters were attributed to the authorship of—that is, they named the sender as—either Lugal-nesage or Lugalšu.

Letter Collection B offers additional relationships between the protagonists, as well as creating new internal connections. Lugal-nesage, son of the schoolmaster Enlil-alsa in most versions of LCB 16 (= ETCSL 3.3.09), was, according to a manuscript from Ur, the son of Zuzu—the schoolmaster attested in another letter from the collection (LCB 12 = ETCSL 5.7.a). This Lugal-nesage is also the protagonist of the second non-epistolary text

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in the collection, a votive inscription to the goddess Nintinuga (LCB 18), in which he is also described as the son of the schoolmaster Zuzu. Enlil-alsa and Lugalšu recur in the greetings of a letter from one Inim-Inana to Enlil-massu (LCB 19 = ETCSL 3.1.17, l. 5). Furthermore, Inim-Inana is the sender of a reprimand addressed to a Lugal-ibila, who has neglected the Sumerian language as well as his school duties (LCB 20 = ETCSL 3.3.12). Because of this group of names and professions, and because of the situations in which the protagonists are engaged, the petitions and private letters of Letter Collection B may thus be seen as the product of a small group of scholars active in Old Babylonian Nippur.

Letter Collection B also contains two royal letters, each with a reply, between high officials and the Isin kings Iddin-Dagan (r. 1974–1954 BC; LCB 2 = ETCSL 3.2.01) and Lipit-Eštar (r. 1934–1924 BC; LCB 5 = ETCSL 3.2.04). Although they were paired with their replies in the collective tablets, most other copyists disregarded the narrative pairing. Strikingly enough, none of these four letters was studied outside the Nippur scribal schools, as far as we know. Private literary letters and the petitions contained in Letter Collection B, on the other hand, did have some success outside Nippur, mostly in the southern Babylonian cities of Ur and Uruk, and as well as in Kiš, near Babylon. As these copies often differ from the Nippur manuscripts, we may deduce that their wider spread was encouraged by their relatively higher potential for narrative variation, perhaps because of their trivial content compared to the royal and petitionary literary letters. Private literary letters were thus seen as suitable exercises for secondary level scribal students.

The two catalogues of literary letters, which I discussed above, list the first lines of some letters that are not attested in Nippur. The Uruk catalogue includes a letter addressed to a later king of the Isin dynasty, Bur-Sin (r. 1895–1874 BC), while I have already mentioned the royal literary letter to Sumu-la'el, king of Babylon (r. 1880–1845 BC), listed in the other catalogue of unknown provenance. The most recent ruler mentioned in Letter Collection B, however, is Lipit-Eštar of Isin (r. 1934–1924 BC), which may suggest that the production of literary letters in Nippur ceased earlier than in Uruk and elsewhere, around the end of the 20th century BC.

There are important connections between Letter Collection B and the Royal Correspondence of Ur. They share two protagonists, Aba'indasa, a senior official of king Šulgi's, and the merchant Ur-DUN, both of whom had real-life counterparts under the rulers of the Third Dynasty of Ur (21st century BC). Their letters can be grouped together into two dossiers but neither seems to have been studied together in antiquity, as far as the grouping of texts in the surviving manuscripts allows us to tell. The smaller dossier concerns Ur-DUN, a merchant who had lost his sealed tablet according to LCB 12, while two other letters, RCU 14 (= ETCSL 3.1.11.1) and a letter from Ur (Gadd and Kramer 1966: no. 561), both refer to the confiscation of Ur-DUN's goods. But this group, to our present knowledge, was never studied together either, nor was it part of the mainstream curriculum.

The other, more voluminous dossier concerns Aba'indasa. As far as the state of the preserved manuscripts allows us to say, Letter Collection B always starts with one of two letters concerning Aba'indasa. The two manuscripts of the 'standard' edition begin with LCB 1 (UM 29–16–139+, a tablet from Nippur kept in the University Museum,

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Philadelphia; Crozer 206, a tablet kept in the Crozer Theological Seminary, Rochester, New York), while two other manuscripts (3N-T80, CBS 7848+, both tablets from Nippur kept in the University Museum, Philadelphia) instead feature a letter from the Royal Correspondence of Ur as the first text (RCU 7 = ETCSL 3.1.05). These letters are clearly related: in the text from the Royal Correspondence of Ur, Šulgi's chancellor Urdugu reports on Aba'indasa who had levied troops unduly, and the other text is a petition from Aba'indasa to win back Šulgi's favour, which may have been seen as some sort of sequel to the first letter. Aba'indasa's misfortune is also the topic of two other letters from the Royal Correspondence of Ur (RCU 6 = ETCSL 3.1.06 and RCU 16 = ETCSL 3.1.06). The chancellor addresses the king in the first of these texts, a fragmentary bilingual letter written in poor Sumerian, which even misspells Aba'indasa's name (this Sumerian name, meaning 'Who equals him?', is here wrongly spelt Aba'andasa, 'Who equals you?'); it may have originally been written in Akkadian (Huber 2001). In the other text, the king in turn blames his chancellor, having received a letter of complaint from Aba'indasa. This missive by Aba'indasa may have been conceived as the first text of the standard edition of Letter Collection B (LCB 1) but this attractive hypothesis cannot be proved and, according to the known collective tablets, this sequence of letters was never studied together as a narrative group. The only exception is a fragmentary prism which contains a divergent and fragmentary version of RCU 16 and three lines of RCU 7. Therefore, however homogeneous Aba'indasa's 'dossier' may seem to us, as far as we know it was never treated as an ensemble, either in Nippur or anywhere else. For this reason we cannot rule out the possibility that the various manuscripts of Letter Collection B start with either LCB 1 or RCU 7 solely because both these letters were addressed to a king of the Ur III dynasty.

Finally, if we consider the Royal Correspondence of Ur on its own, the same centrifugal tendency can be observed. Although many of these letters are linked by their contents, they were not ordered on the tablets in any consistent thematic groupings and the individual texts were less standardized than those of Letter Collection B. The Nippur version of RCU 19 (= ETCSL 3.1.17), presumably the original version of the text, is significantly shorter than the variants found elsewhere, suggesting that it was subject to editorial elaboration in the course of its educational career. Similarly a tablet that perhaps originates from the kingdom of Ešnunna in northeastern Babylonia contains a collection of four letters to and from Išbi-Erra, the first ruler of the Dynasty of Isin which succeeded the kings of Ur (RCU 19–22 = ETCSL 3.1.17–20), that display important narrative variations from the Nippur recension. In addition, scribal schools of the peripheral areas show an ability to increase the corpus not just with variations but even with new letters. A letter from Šulgi of Ur to Išbi-Erra of Isin (RCU 15 = ETCSL 3.1.13.2), for instance, is known only from Susa and is undoubtedly pseudo-epigraphical (Edzard 1974: 10; Huber 2001: 170).

While we have so far focused on texts copied together, it is important to emphasize that literary letters were for the most part copied individually. Of the ninety-three manuscripts of the Royal Correspondence of Ur known to me, only seventeen contain more than one letter, and six contain letters from both this letter corpus and Letter Collection B.

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Of over 150 manuscripts of Letter Collection B and other literary letters, 109 tablets comprise only one letter. Clearly, the literary letters mostly served as simple epistolary exercises for Old Babylonian scribal students and were not usually intended as chapters in an overarching narrative. Where sequences can be detected, as in the larger tablets of Letter Collection B, it seems that the teachers merely followed traditional groupings and orderings.

It is obvious that the literary letters were given to students who had already mastered the Sumerian language. They were more or less standardized as curricular compositions, especially in Nippur, the city that has yielded most known copies. But copyists often introduced variants into the epistolary structure, ranging from the addition of hymnic excerpts to playing with names and numerical variations. Students of the peripheral schools, in particular, strongly tended towards narrative variation, even towards new compositions such as RCU 15 (= ETCSL 3.1.13.2). The authorship of some of the letters was attributed to scribes or advanced students who were presented as sons of local schoolmasters. It cannot be proved whether these were historical or fictional figures, or some amalgam of the two, but this choice of professional designation may well have reflected the reality of local epistolary production.

From copy to epistolary composition

Exposure to Letter Collection B and other literary letters equipped advanced scribal students with the skills to compose prose letters in Sumerian as well as poetic letter-prayers. We can sum up briefly how to write a Sumerian letter by following the three-part structure of the model: first, the 'after you have said to him—(this) is what he says' address; second, the message or narrative part; third, one or several of the stock phrases for the closure formulas to conclude the letter. Depending on the period, the following grammatical rules were applied: in the Ur III period, the pattern I (= sender)—you (= messenger)—he (= addressee); in the Old Babylonian period, I (= sender)—you (= addressee). For a letter-prayer, the 'after you have added' formula had to be inserted and the recipient needed to be addressed in a hymnic style.

But did the students have enough background knowledge to create new compositions? If, as the literary catalogues suggest, letter-writing in Sumerian typically followed training in mythological and hymnic compositions, students were well aware of high literary style and were capable of using literary extracts in their letters. It is possible, but cannot be proved, that advanced students also had access to what might be called the literature of royal chanceries (Hallo 2006: 88). It is, however, certain that during the Old Babylonian period scribal students sometimes copied royal inscriptions of earlier rulers and seal impressions of high officials, most of whom had lived during the Ur III period. Of the elementary phase of scribal education, the geographical lists and name lists would have provided useful material even for more trivial letters. Even once the Sumerian language was no longer known in its every subtlety, students could have drawn on the so-called

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Old Babylonian grammatical texts (Black 1991; Veldhuis 2000), which were full of the verbal forms such as wishes and commands that were particularly relevant to letter-writing.

Writing letters in Sumerian can therefore be seen as a short and simple exercise for skilled students. We have shown that they had the necessary tools and knowledge, but did they have any motive for composing pseudo-epigraphical letters such as those of the Royal Correspondence of Ur? Certainly not, if one assumes that the historical content of such texts was of primary concern, as some modern scholars maintain (Hallo 2006). But, as we have seen, the main aim of the literary letters was to provide training in writing a particular genre of Sumerian text. The discussion surrounding the authenticity of the Royal Correspondence of Ur, which is preserved only in Old Babylonian copies, need not be revisited here (cf. Huber 2001; Hallo 2006; Cavigneaux 2007); suffice it to say that the typically Old Babylonian linguistic features and the obvious anachronisms regarding the protagonists (Huber 2001; Huber Vulliet 2009) make it difficult to see them as original compositions from an earlier age. However, some striking grammatical features of Old Babylonian Sumerian, as it is used in these letters, can be further correlated with the Old Babylonian epistolary formulas of archival letters and therefore deserve our attention.

Apart from standard epistolary formulas, such as the closure 'May my king know it', the royal literary correspondence does not use the Ur III three-participant pattern described above but the Old Babylonian two-participant structure. The opening formula already introduces a multi-referential second person:

> To my king, after **you** (i.e. the messenger) have said,
> what/thus PN, **your** (i.e. the addressee's) servant, says.

As the verbal form 'after you have said' was merely a frozen formula from the early second millennium BC onwards, it is unclear whether its implicit reference to a messenger was still understood; it certainly could result in the Old Babylonian scribal students applying erroneous syntax. Other letter-like formulas sharing Old Babylonian grammatical patterns were also introduced into the royal literary correspondence, inducing grammatical confusion between the first and second person. For instance, 'thus you instructed me', was written 'thus you instructed you' (a_2-$še_3$ mu-e-da-(a-)a$ĝ_2$, see Huber 2001: 175–176). The same phenomenon also occurs in the frequent phrase '(the man) you sent you' instead of 'you sent me'. Furthermore, in Sumerian from the early second millennium onwards the agent in the first and second person could be written with a third-person prefix, as is attested in the Royal Correspondence of Ur (Huber 2001: 174–175). In the literary royal letters, which were already written with jumbled frozen three-participant epistolary formulas and with the second person referring to the addressee, this could only lead to ambiguous messages, and hence inefficient communication—the exact opposite of what letter-writing was meant to achieve according to the passage in *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* which started off our discussion.

Akkadianisms, too, were introduced into the epistolary formulas. For instance, Akkadian *-ma* 'and, then' was used repeatedly to structure the message in one of the letters of the already mentioned 'dossier' of the merchant Ur-DUN (RCU 14 = ETCSL

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3.1.11.1; see Huber 2001: 173). Epistolary formulas could be borrowed from Akkadian ones: hence, 'I shall do what my lord says' (niĝ$_2$ lugal-ĝu$_{10}$ ab-be$_2$-na ga-ab-AK) is a translation of an Akkadian closure formula (*ša bēlī iqabbû lūpuš*, see Michalowski 1976: 175–176). Original Sumerian archival letters, on the other hand, use the phrase 'what X says' (X-e a-na ab-be$_2$(-a); e.g. Keiser 1919: no. 3, 1–2 and Molina 1999–2000: 224 no. 24, 4–5) which is also attested in legal documents.

Apart from such grammatical anachronisms, the following related excerpts illustrate how new literary letters could be composed by drawing on existing compositions. The first letter (RCU 2 = ETCSL 3.1.02) was supposedly sent by Šulgi of Ur, the second (RCU 18 = ETCSL 3.1.16) by his son and successor Šu-Suen, and the third (RCU 15 = ETCSL 3.1.13.2 = Edzard 1974: 9–34) again by Šulgi, although the context would better suit his grandson Ibbi-Suen. This last letter is a bilingual composition in Sumerian and Akkadian, attested only in Susa and certainly pseudo-epigraphical (see above).

RCU 2	*RCU 18*	*RCU 15*
Lines 16–17: Thus I have instructed you. How is it that you do not act like me?	Lines 23–24: Thus I have instructed you. How is it that you do not act like me?	
Lines 18–23: If I do not make my 'wise men of the assembly' as important as me, (If) he does not sit on a throne, thrown on a golden dais, (If) he does not rest his feet on a golden footstool, (If) he did not appoint or remove a governor from his governorship, an official from his charge in all sovereignty,		Lines 24–29: You are important as I am. Sit before them on a throne on a golden dais! May their messengers…in front of…(Akkadian: May their messengers bow down before you)! On their chairs…your hand (Akkadian: Be higher than them, do not change anything!), *Make rise*? a governor, appoint a governor! *Make rise*? a general, up grade a captain!
Lines 24–26: (If) he did not kill anyone, if he did not blind anyone, (If) he does not raise the man he has chosen, How will he fortify the territory?	Lines 25–27: To kill anyone, to blind anyone, You *do not have it in your hand*. I provided you with authority.	Lines 30–33: Do not let kill anyone: the one who has killed, blind him! The officer who…favourably, build him 'your house of youthfulness'!

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Another example of such borrowing is the insertion of the exact same literary excerpt in two letters of the Royal Correspondence of Ur (RCU 3 = ETCSL 3.1.11, l. 7 // RCU 10 = ETCSL 3.1.08, l. 15). The writer also added a pun here on a protagonist's name, Apilaša, by slightly changing the phrase 'the ploughmen in the fields', lu_2 gud apin-la_2 a-ša-ga, into lu_2-u_2 a-pil-la_2 a-ša-gu, which means—apart from the final alteration ĝ to g—'my men of Apilaša'.

In short, in addition to Old Babylonian spelling practices, Akkadianisms, and anachronisms, the manuscripts of the Royal Correspondence of Ur show many textual features—assonance, thematic variation, rhetorical inversion—that are typical of the didactic compositions of the Old Babylonian schools. Similar features can be found in Letter Collection B. I therefore suggest that the Sumerian epistolary form, as a short, well-structured narrative genre, provided advanced scribal students with a flexible model for training in Sumerian composition.

The literary letters as historical sources?

The literary letters' modern editors (Ali 1964; Michalowski 1978) have highlighted and discussed their 'authentic core': the names of rulers of the Ur III and Isin-Larsa dynasties, and other protagonists and information about events that are independently attested in reliable historical sources. Because of these verifiable historical details, the Royal Correspondence of Ur has been long considered by modern scholars as more or less genuine, even though it is preserved only in Old Babylonian copies, written out several centuries after the events they purport to witness. Samuel Kramer, for instance, wrote this influential assessment:

> There are several factors which tend to indicate that, at least in part, it was a literary fabrication of the Sumerian scribes who lived quite some time after the struggle between Ibbi-Sin and Ishbi-Erra (*i.e. the end of the Third Dynasty of Ur*). But no matter how and when the later scribes modified the original text of the letter, its historical portions are no doubt authentic. Indeed, even if we assume that the document before us is a literary fiction of the later scribes, and that no such letter was ever written by Ibbi-Sin, it is still reasonable to assume that its historical details were not invented, but were based on actual data available to the scribes. (Kramer 1963: 480).

Some scholars have raised doubts about this 'authentic core' (for references see Huber 2001: 170), doubts that in turn have been further challenged (Hallo 2006). However, there is no question now that an unknown number of the literary letters, including texts from Letter Collection B, are fictitious letter-like compositions.

But if one wants to use these letters as a source of information, one's attention should focus not on the events described but on how they are narrated. Hence, as we have already seen, the original three-part structure of the epistolary genre and its specific three-person pattern reflects a particular communicative situation that employs a messenger. When read as a group, letters can show recurring thematic relations, charac-

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ter types, and narrative events that are related to properties inherent to the letters themselves (Altman 1982: 3–4). Although Sumerian literary letters were, in the great majority, copied individually, they too can be seen as components of a 'historical epistolary novel', which advanced scribal students had the opportunity to create for themselves.

Yet these students have left no evidence of attempts to handle royal literary letters as a historiographical corpus. Tellingly, scribal students regularly disregarded 'historical' data, such as personal and place names, which could have helped modern scholars to contextualize the historical narrative. Their fundamental concern was to copy, improve, or create a narrative in the Sumerian language within a simple epistolary framework. The genre's short narrative, epistolary formulas and stock phrases provided a valuable and flexible medium for scholarly training in Sumerian and even in simple mathematics. Royal literary letters were not treated like the royal inscriptions or other chancery literature, which were copied with great attention to the original, and they were never included in the collective tablets of royal inscriptions compiled in Old Babylonian Nippur (e.g. Frayne 1997: 295–320 for collections of the inscriptions of Šu-Suen of Ur) at the same time that the surviving manuscripts of the literary letters were written.

Searching for an authentic and reliable historical core therefore seems hopeless. While at least some royal literary letters may have been inspired by actual royal correspondence (whose existence naturally cannot be doubted) and thus might merit consideration alongside other Old Babylonian historiographical sources, the fact remains that the epistolary genre was never used for historiography within cuneiform culture, and this should be acknowledged and respected.

Further reading

For letter-writing in general see Sallaberger (1996; 1999) and Kraus (1959). Editions of Sumerian archival letters can be found in the publications of Sollberger (1966), Kienast and Volk (1995), and Molina (1999–2000), while Michalowski (1993) provides a useful overview of the genre. The corpus of Sumerian literary letters is published by Ali (1964), Hallo (1968; 1976; 1982; 1991; 1998), and Michalowski (1976; 1978; 2011). For a discussion of the letter-prayers see also Böck (1996). Altman (1982) gives a linguistic analysis of epistolary discourse. MacLean (2000) and Barton and Hall (2000) provide surveys of epistolary genres, beginning with Mesopotamian letters.

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CHAPTER 24

KEEPING COMPANY WITH MEN OF LEARNING: THE KING AS SCHOLAR

ECKART FRAHM

Power has many faces, and does not lend itself easily to a single comprehensive theory. One of the most influential recent attempts to analyse its basic components is owed to the British-born sociologist Michael Mann. Drawing on concepts developed by Max Weber, Mann distinguishes four main dimensions of power: political, military, economic, and ideological (Mann 1986: 1–33). The first three of these aspects represent what one might call 'hard power'. The third, in contrast, ideological authority, seems to belong to the realm of 'soft power', and one might feel inclined, at first glance, to regard it as less significant than (and if one were to follow the Marxist view, potentially derivative from) the other elements that constitute power. Often enough, though, it was the rise of new ideas that thoroughly changed the course of history and brought new elites into positions of authority. For those who wielded power, having control over social norms, concepts that provide meaning, and aesthetic and ritual practices was at all times of vital importance.

In ancient Mesopotamia, power was to a significant extent in the hand of autocratic rulers who bore such titles as en, énsi, *rubā'um*/*rubû*(*m*), and, most importantly, lugal or *šarru*(*m*), the two terms, one Sumerian and one Akkadian, that modern Assyriologists usually translate as 'king' (Edzard 1972–75; Heimpel 1992; Selz 1998). These rulers did not have an exclusive monopoly on authority in the states headed by them. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that not only kings but also local institutions such as city assemblies exercised power throughout much of Mesopotamian history (Fleming 2004; Seri 2006). The temple sector held a certain, albeit limited, degree of autonomous power as well (Kleber 2008: 344–348). In the pre-modern age, in which rulers were still benignly ignorant of certain modern technologies of political repression, any attempt to attain 'total power' was doomed to fail. And yet, it cannot be denied that

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kings played a pivotal role in the Mesopotamian world (Cancik-Kirschbaum 2007). Whether they ruled the city-states of the third and early second millennium, the territorial states of the second half of the second millennium, or the large empires of the first millennium BC, kings (and the 'ens' and 'énsis' that we include under this term in the following) dominated the political, military, and economic sphere, and also that of ideological power, the domain of religion and culture. It was the kings who sponsored the construction, restoration, and maintenance of temples, participated in religious rites, held public triumphs—and were the focus of countless images and texts that were widely distributed.

The prominent role monarchs hold in the Mesopotamian textual record can hardly be overstated. Kings are the protagonists of the cycle of epics about Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgameš of Uruk, Etana, and many other literary compositions. They dominate almost all of Mesopotamia's historiographic tradition, from chronographic texts to the royal inscriptions discussed further below. They also feature prominently in scholarly texts, above all astrological and extispicy-related omen treatises with their thousands of apodoses that deal with the royal fate. Rulers of the past were remembered in king lists and historical legends, while the destiny of future rulers dominated the agenda of prophecies and literary predictive texts.

Most probably, the creation of this large corpus of texts with a focus on kings and kingship was an endeavour that involved, primarily, not the kings themselves, but scribes and scholars who were more or less immediately associated with them. But there is a lot of evidence that at least some Mesopotamian kings took a very serious personal interest in scribal matters and influenced more directly the production of texts of all sorts. These were the 'learned kings' to be discussed in this chapter. Their 'learnedness' should be distinguished from what is conventionally designated as 'wisdom'. In Mesopotamia, learnedness was closely associated with writing, while the quality of wisdom was not, at least not necessarily. Many Mesopotamian rulers present themselves, in their own inscriptions, as 'wise' kings. They use Sumerian epithets such as (lú-)geštug-dagal-la '(man) of wide understanding' (literally, '(man) with a wide ear'), lú-igi-gál-tuku 'knowledgeable man' (literally, 'man who has what requires eyes'), or gal-zu-níg-nam-ma 'who is wise in everything', and Akkadian ones such as *āhiz nēmeqi* 'who has acquired deep wisdom', *eršu* 'crafty', *hāsis kal šipri* 'clever in every type of work', and *mūdû* 'knowledgeable', among others (Seux 1967). But, as pointed out by Galter (1983) and Wilcke (1991), these self-predications are rather vague; they can refer to the pragmatic as well as the speculative sphere, without automatically implying any deeper immersion in written lore. In accordance with the goals of this handbook, the following overview will focus on Mesopotamian rulers who were not just 'wise', but had a demonstrable interest in the scribal culture of their age. Starting with particular cases before touching upon more general topics, the chapter will conclude with some general reflections on how the king's influence on the arts and sciences shaped the intellectual discourse of ancient Mesopotamia.

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Learned kings in Mesopotamian history and tradition

When studying the many references to events of the remote past that can be found in Mesopotamian texts, the modern historian faces a fundamental methodological problem: are they relevant for an actual reconstruction of that past, or should they rather be read as reflections of the age when they were most probably written down for the first time? There is no easy answer to this question (see Beckman 2005), but we are probably well advised to regard the various Mesopotamian stories about learned kings at the dawn of history as attempts of a later age to legitimize its practices and ideas by reprojecting them to the era of some famous, but often imaginary, early rulers. This applies, for example, to the texts that talk about a close association of the legendary kings from before the flood with a group of seven semi-divine sages, the first of whom, known as Adapa or Uanna (Greek Oannes), is credited with having revealed to humankind all available knowledge, both practical and theoretical (Reiner 1961; Wilcke 1991). It also applies to a text from the first millennium BC that claims that the arcane science of extispicy (i.e. the art of reading the entrails of the sacrificial animal), was first revealed by the gods Šamaš and Adad to the antediluvian king Enmeduranki, who in turn passed it on, in Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon, to the ancestors of the later haruspices (Lambert 1998). Famous early kings of the postdiluvian era were regarded as instigators of intellectual innovation by later tradition as well. The epic *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, for example (ETCSL 1.8.2.3), reports that Enmerkar, a legendary king of Uruk, invented writing on clay tablets when he realized that the couriers he had sent to the far-away land of Aratta were unable to memorize his messages (Vanstiphout 2004: 84–85, ll. 497–506; see Huber Vulliet in this volume). Again, there is no question that this is a story and not history.

Reliable contemporary evidence for royal sponsorship of the scribal arts is rare during the first 1200 years that followed the invention of writing around 3300 BC. This absence of evidence does not have to be regarded as evidence of absence, however—after all, many of the text genres that inform us about royal interest in scribal matters in later times were simply not yet in use during this period. What is clear is that Mesopotamian scribes, from very early on, occupied influential positions at the head of the great institutions of power, and that many of them wrote both administrative texts and learned lexical lists (Visicato 2000). The extent to which sovereigns were literate in early Mesopotamia remains unclear, but given the high degree of literacy among certain portions of the elite of this period, Visicato (2000: 236) may be right when he assumes that, especially towards the middle of the third millennium, 'the majority of governors and kings arose from the category of scribes'.

The earliest Mesopotamian king who presents himself as deeply fascinated by scribal culture is Šulgi of Ur (r. 2094–2047 BC; see Figure 14.1), who declares in one of his numerous royal hymns (Šulgi B, ll. 13–17, ETCSL 2.4.2.02; Sjöberg 1975, 172–73):

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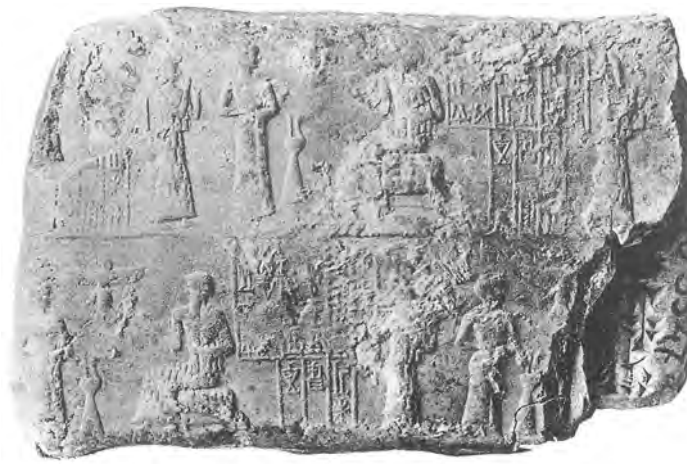

FIGURE 24.1 Impression of a cylinder seal owned by a royal scribe from the time of Šulgi, with the king depicted sitting on a throne (Louvre, AO 3547b). The legend of the seal reads: 'Šulgi, strong man, king of Ur, king of the four quarters of the world, Ur-Lamma the scribe is your servant.' (Reproduced from Delaporte 1920: vol. 2, pl. 12:6 (T.215))

> As a youth, when in school,
> I studied the scribal art from the tablets of Sumer and Akkad.
> No noble could write on clay as I did.
> In the place where people go to master the scribal art,
> Adding, subtracting, counting, and accounting I mastered completely.

Šulgi not only praises his scribal skills, his knowledge of Sumerian and Akkadian, and his mathematical understanding, he also boasts of having mastered other intellectual challenges. He claims to have fluently spoken Amorite, Elamite, Subartian, and the language of Meluhha (the Mesopotamian term for the Indus Valley civilization) (Šulgi B, ll. 206–219; Šulgi C, ll. 119–124, ETCSL 2.4.2.03; cf. Rubio 2006), to have been an accomplished musician (Šulgi B, ll. 154–174; cf. Krispijn 1990), and to have excelled in interpreting the entrails of the sacrificial animal (Šulgi B, ll. 131–149; Michalowski 2006). These various accomplishments bring to mind the *artes liberales* of the Middle Ages: grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music. Šulgi's are the first inscriptions to mention the Sumerian 'school', which is called *edubba'a*, literally, 'house where tablets are distributed' (Volk 2000; George 2005). Michalowski (2003) has suggested that it was Šulgi, either in person or as represented by some of his trusted scribes, who introduced new groups of literary texts into the school curriculum, including the royal hymns, while thoroughly revising others. Many of these texts continued to be studied in school during the next 400 years.

The later kings of the Ur III era and the rulers of the Isin and, to some extent, the Larsa dynasties that followed emulated Šulgi's literary ambitions (see Brisch in this volume). Like Šulgi, many of them commissioned royal hymns written in highly poetic Sumerian,

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even though spoken Sumerian was increasingly marginalized by Akkadian. Išme-Dagan (r. 1953–1935 BC), Lipit-Eštar (r. 1934–1924 BC) (who claims that Nisaba, the divine patroness of writing, guided his fingers along the clay), Enlil-bani (r. 1860–1837 BC), and Siniddinam (r. 1849–1843 BC) make explicit reference in some of their hymns to their accomplishments in the scribal arts (Charpin 2008: 33, 36, 270, n. 23; Vanstiphout 1978: 36–37, l. 17–24; Sjöberg 1975: 174–175; Veldhuis 1997: 25).

The end of the Isin–Larsa period marks the beginning of a fast decline of some of the most important cities of the Mesopotamian south, up to then the centre of cuneiform culture. The kings of Babylon and upper Mesopotamia who dominated Mesopotamian politics during the following 200 years were less interested in commissioning Sumerian royal hymns than their predecessors and generally abstained from boasts of being well versed in the scribal arts. Nonetheless, indirect evidence suggests that at least some of them continued to pay close attention to scholarship and literature. Hammurabi of Babylon (r. 1792–1750 BC) may well have been involved in person in the creation of the famous laws put into writing during his reign (Roth 1995: 71–142), and later tradition regarded his tenure as a period that saw a significant advancement of medical knowledge (see below). At Mari, female scribes associated with the harem of king Zimri-Lim (r. 1775–1762 BC) bore names based on Emesal (a variant of Sumerian originally spoken by women, but after 2000 BC essentially restricted to a liturgical use), indicating that a rather refined intellectual climate was cultivated at the court there (Ziegler 1999: 91–92). Zimri-Lim's predecessor Yasmah-Addu (r. *c.* 1787–1775 BC), whose teacher had been a certain Ibbi-Ilabrat, chief musician of his father Samsi-Adad, showed an unusual interest in music (Ziegler 2007: 147–164). A letter from Mari refers to a young prince who was supposed to be educated in the scribal arts (*ṭupšarrūtu*) and in extispicy (*bārûtu*) (Durand 1988: 63; Charpin 2008: 46–48). And Iltani, a princess residing in the upper Mesopotamian city of Qaṭṭara, was married to a man who, originally a diviner (*bārû*) by profession, later became king of Karana (Eidem 1989). Their union combined power and (scribal) knowledge in the most intimate way imaginable.

At the other end of the Mesopotamian world, in the region bordering the Persian Gulf, the scribal activities that had thrived under the kingdoms of Isin and Larsa found some continuation under the first dynasty of the Sealand, which ruled until the 15th century BC (Dalley 2009). A recently discovered manuscript of an unusual version of the *Epic of Gilgameš* (George 2007) and a cryptographically written recipe for making glass dated to the sixth king of the dynasty, Gulkišar (Hunger 1968: no. 67), indicate that a sophisticated scribal culture flourished under the kings of the Sealand. Whether they actively promoted this culture is not completely clear, but the highly learned Sumerian (or pseudo-Sumerian) names born by the Sealand kings Gulkišar, Pešgaldaramaš, Adarakalamma, Ekurduanna, and Melamkurkurra (Grayson 1980–83: 91, 100, 117; Dalley 2009: 13) make some involvement on their part rather probable.

Royal interest in scribal matters continued during the second half of the second millennium BC. Even though the Kassite kings who ruled Babylonia from the 16th to the 12th centuries were foreigners, they seem to have endorsed Mesopotamian culture quite willingly. Specific evidence for their sponsorship of scribal activities is scant, but not

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non-existent. A long royal inscription from the reign of Kurigalzu I (first half of the 14th century BC) is composed in a very learned Sumerian heavily influenced by the lexical tradition (Veldhuis 2008). A colophon on a tablet from Assur (Hunger 1968: no. 292) claims that scholars from seven different Babylonian cities dedicated a newly created edition of a hemerological treatise to the Kassite ruler Nazi-Maruttaš (r. 1307–1282 BC), who may well have commissioned their work. And when the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (r. 1243–1207 BC) captured Babylon in 1215 BC, he took away numerous clay tablets inscribed with exorcistic, divinatory, and medical texts that might have belonged to the Kassite kings according to the royal epic celebrating the victory (Foster 2005: 315, vi 1'–13').

Even though there are few contemporary sources, later evidence indicates that the time of the kings of the post-Kassite Isin II dynasty, which ruled Babylonia from 1157 to 1026 BC, saw a remarkable spike in scribal activities. After Nebuchadnezzar I (r. 1125–1104 BC) had conquered Elam and repatriated the stolen cult image of the Babylonian god Marduk, numerous texts were created to celebrate the great achievements of this king (Foster 2005: 376–391). One of them, known as *The Seed of Kingship*, is a Sumero-Akkadian composition alluding to Nebuchadnezzar's descent from Enmerkar, the legendary antediluvian learned king mentioned earlier. It is possible that the Babylonian epic of creation (*Enūma Eliš*), a text full of rare words and scribal puns, was composed under Nebuchadnezzar as well (Lambert 1964). Later Isin II rulers showed an equally great passion for literary and scholarly endeavors. The correspondence that Marduk-nadin-ahhe (r. 1099–1082 BC) exchanged with the scholars of his age was regarded as so valuable that it was preserved to be consulted by later generations; it is quoted in a letter written in 657 BC by the Assyrian scholar Akkullanu to king Assurbanipal (Parpola 1993: no. 100, rev. 1–7). And as considered further below, there were few periods in Mesopotamian history that saw more intensive editorial activities than the reign of the Isin II king Adad-apla-iddina (r. 1068–1047 BC).

In the course of the first centuries of the first millennium, Babylonia experienced a long political crisis, caused by both internal and external factors, while Assyria, Babylonia's northern neighbour, slowly grew into what became, between 745 and 630 BC, the first true empire in world history. With regard to its scribal culture, however, Assyria continued, as it had done for centuries, to depend on Babylonian traditions that it was eager to appropriate. Usually, this northbound 'transfer of knowledge' seems to have occurred on a voluntary basis, but sometimes, following the precedent set by Tukulti-Ninurta's 1215 'booknapping', force was used. A case in point is the abduction, in 675 BC, of a number of highly learned Babylonian dignitaries by king Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC). According to a short memorandum (Fales and Postgate 1995: no. 156), the dignitaries in question, among them Ninurta-gamil, the son of the mayor of Nippur, and Kudurru, the son of the ruler of the Chaldaean state of Bit-Dakkuri, were held hostage at Nineveh and, when not put in irons, forced to copy cuneiform texts such as the exorcistic series *Udug-Hul* (Parpola 1983b: 458–459; Nissinen 1998: 135–140). The episode illustrates not only the great hunger of the Late Assyrian kings for Babylonian culture, but also the fact that the sons of Babylonian local leaders were apparently well versed in scribal lore.

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A thorough scribal education is also what Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c.* 630 BC), the last great Assyrian king, boasts of having received in his youth. In his famous 'autobiography' (Zamazalová in this volume), he claims to have 'learnt the craft of the wise sage Adapa', to have studied the tablet 'The liver is a mirror of heaven' (the penultimate section of the extispicy series *Bārûtu*) and to have 'discussed it in the assembly of scholars', in a way reminiscent of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple; drawing on the opening of the *Epic of Gilgameš* (Pongratz-Leisten 1999a: 312), he even declares that he had studied 'cuneiform sign(s) on stones (dating) from before the flood'. In another text, Assurbanipal adds that the god Aššur had given into his hand '(all) the languages of the east and the west' (Borger 1996: 182, 218, ll. 9–10). Assurbanipal is the only Mesopotamian king who commissioned images of his royal persona with a writing instrument, namely a stylus of a type used for wax tablets, put into his belt (Seidl 2007; see Figure 15.3). There are indications that he did in fact write some letters and prayers found at Nineveh himself (Livingstone 2007). Assurbanipal's wife, Libbali-šarrat, seems to have shared her husband's learned ambitions. In a letter, her sister-in-law, Šerua-eṭirat, refers, perhaps ironically (Parpola 1997: 321, n. 18), to Libbali-šarrat's eager study habits (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002: no. 28).

Nothing, of course, demonstrates Assurbanipal's deep fascination with the scribal arts more impressively than the famous libraries he created in his capital city Nineveh. They eventually housed thousands of cuneiform texts, of which some 650 were commentaries that helped to make this *embarras de richesses* of written lore more accessible to the king himself (Frahm 2004). The circumstances under which Assurbanipal assembled his libraries will be discussed further below.

The last Mesopotamian king who refers to his interest in the scribal arts in explicit terms was the Neo-Babylonian ruler Nabonidus (r. 555–539 BC; Figure 24.2). In one of his inscriptions, Nabonidus claims that the god Ea 'had endowed him with perfect wisdom' and that Nabu, divine patron of written lore, 'had bestowed on him (knowledge of) the *scribal skills*' (Schaudig 2002: 621–622). The inscription uses a rare and learned Akkadian word, *šukāmu*, to refer to the king's acquaintance with scribal matters, thereby demonstrating that his claims were well founded. Nabonidus was particularly proud of his mastery of the omen tradition. Two of his inscriptions quote long sequences of protases and apodoses pertaining to extispicies he had carried out (Schaudig 2001: 378–384, 514–529), and the Royal Chronicle (Schaudig 2001: 590–595) points to a situation in which Nabonidus's scholars had been unable to understand an entry of the astrological series *Enūma Anu Enlil* without the help of the king. This last episode subsequently became the focus of a polemical critique of the monarch, discussed at the end of this chapter.

The kings who ruled Babylonia after the downfall of the Chaldaean dynasty were foreigners who no longer governed from Mesopotamia's traditional urban centres, but from other cities. They no longer spoke Akkadian, and they were clearly less interested in cuneiform traditions than their predecessors had been. Longer inscriptions written in Babylonian cuneiform survive from the reigns of only three Achaemenid and Seleucid kings, each in need of consolidating his power by ingratiating himself with the traditional

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FIGURE 24.2 Stela of Nabonidus (British Museum, ME 90837 (1825.5–3.99)). (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website: http://tinyurl.com/32zve6r)

Mesopotamian elites: Cyrus (r. 559–530 BC, from 538 king of Babylon), the founder of Persian rule, commissioned a text celebrating his restoration of Babylonia's old cult centres, the so-called Cyrus Cylinder from Babylon (Schaudig 2001: 550–556). The usurper Darius (r. 521–486 BC) had his deeds celebrated in a long inscription carved on a cliff at Bisutun in the Kermanshah province of Iran (Malbran-Labat 1994). And Antiochus I (r. 281–261 BC), the second ruler of the Seleucid dynasty, left an inscription, written in highly archaizing cuneiform script, in the Ezida temple in Borsippa (Foster 2005: 866).

The prestige associated with the cuneiform writing system did not vanish all at once. In fact, Darius's scholars invented their own cuneiform script to write royal inscriptions in Old Persian. But slowly, cuneiform became the exclusive domain of a small circle of *literati* and priests who lived and worked, increasingly marginalized, in Babylon, Borsippa, Uruk, Nippur, and a few other old centres of Mesopotamian scholarship (Beaulieu 2006). These men kept cuneiform civilization alive for another 600 years. They remembered legendary as well as historical kings who had once sponsored the scribal arts, especially Assurbanipal, whose learned correspondence with the scholars of Babylon and Borsippa, devoted to the creation of the Nineveh libraries, was still

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faithfully copied, and even written on stone, in the 2nd century BC (Frame and George 2005; Frahm 2005). But by this time, no contemporary ruler seems to have shown substantial interest in cuneiform culture any more.

If one looks at Mesopotamian history as a whole, it seems that a few kings, in particular Šulgi, Assurbanipal, and Nabonidus, stand out among the many hundreds of rulers attested in Mesopotamian sources as particularly 'learned'. Of course, one could argue that this picture, owed as it is to the chances of discovery, is potentially incomplete. But while it is certainly possible, and perhaps even likely, that there were other rulers who, unknown to us, excelled in the scribal arts as well, the sheer quantity of texts testifying to the learnedness of the aforementioned three kings does seem to indicate that the extent of their immersion in cuneiform culture was indeed exceptional—especially when one considers that the texts in question derive both from their own reigns and from later periods. At the same time, it would be mistaken to assume that other Mesopotamian rulers were, as a rule, completely illiterate. Recent studies have shown that the degree of literacy among the higher echelons of Mesopotamian society was probably much greater than hitherto thought (Parpola 1997; Charpin 2008: 31–51), and it seems quite likely that many kings of the second and first millennia (as we have already argued with regard to the rulers of the first 1200 years of cuneiform civilization) were sufficiently educated to read and understand at least some texts, especially the many letters they received. Some may even have written such letters. As recently pointed out by Charpin (2008: 49), several rather private letters that Išme-Dagan of Ekallatum sent to his brother Yasmah-Addu of Mari display a peculiar handwriting, indicating that they may have been put into writing by Išme-Dagan himself.

Kings and their scribes and scholars

Mesopotamian kings interested in written lore received their education in the scribal arts, and instruction on everything pertaining thereto, from scholars closely associated with their courts (Sweet 1990). Two types of sources are particularly valuable for an attempt to illuminate the nature of the relationship between kings and their *literati*: king lists and letters.

Most king lists are nothing but inventories of rulers combined with information on the lengths of their reigns. Some, however, provide additional information: they associate the names of certain kings with those of the master-scholars who served as their advisors. Four of these lists, all dealing with post-Old Babylonian kings, seem to provide historically reliable data: the Synchronistic King List, and king lists 14, 15, and 17 (Grayson 1980–83; cf. Parpola 1983b: 448–449; Lenzi 2008: 72–77). They all use the formula: 'RN, PN *ummânšu*'—'(As for) RN, PN was his master-scholar.' The title *ummânu* designates, in principle, scholars (and craftsmen) of very different skill levels, but in the king lists it clearly refers to a kind of royal 'chief ideologue'. A few of the *ummânu*s featured in the lists are known from additional sources, indicating that the references to them are grounded in reality.

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A fifth list, known from a Seleucid copy from the city of Uruk (Figure 24.3), is, at least in part, of a more imaginary nature. It begins with pairing the seven *apkallu*-sages with antediluvian kings (and one with a postdiluvian ruler, Enmerkar) and then continues with entries in which several other kings are associated with *ummânu*s (Dijk 1962). Quite clearly, the first section of the list represents an attempt by later scribes to reproject their role as royal advisors to earlier times (Beaulieu 2007; Lenzi 2008: 106–122). There is, for instance, no doubt that Sin-leqe-unninni, the ancestor of a family of scribes with branches in Uruk and Babylon, had not really been the *ummânu* of the legendary Gilgameš, as claimed by the list. But according to a 'catalogue of texts and authors' from Nineveh (Lambert 1962), first-millennium scholars regarded Sin-leqe-unninni as the author/editor of the *Epic of Gilgameš*, and since they read this epic not as a fairy tale, but as a historical account of very early times, they felt he had to be a contemporary of the royal protagonist of the text.

Both the factually accurate and the fictional entries on individual kings and their master-scholars reveal two things: first, that the scribes of first-millennium Mesopotamia

FIGURE 24.3 List of sages serving famous kings, from Hellenistic Uruk (Iraq Museum, W 20030, 7). (Drawing by J. van Dijk, from Dijk 1962: 53)

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regarded their role as largely defined by their close relationship with the king, and second, that they believed that their advice was of unique importance to the ruler. After all, no king list ever pairs the name of a king with that of his queen or some influential governor or general—only the master-scholars are mentioned, and their succession along with that of the royal line has an almost 'dynastic' quality of its own.

Of course, it was neither the queen nor a general who actually composed and copied the king lists. This was, instead, the prerogative of the scribes, and it seems likely that their focus on their own special relationship with the king, and their neglect of the role played by members of the royal family or high-ranking military and political leaders, is to some extent an act of self-promotion. Scholars have at all times demonstrated a certain inclination to exaggerate their own importance, and the *literati* of ancient Mesopotamia were probably no exception. There is, however, evidence that at least some kings took the advice of their scholars quite seriously. This evidence comes from the second group of sources documenting the relationship between rulers and their *literati*: the letters and reports scholars sent to their kings, and those written by others that mention scholarly activity on behalf of the ruler.

The earliest extant letter corpus dealing with such matters comes from the royal archives of Mari and has been edited in exemplary fashion by Durand (1988). The letters in question were sent by diviners, or by officials reporting on divination and other ominous activities and phenomena, to the Mari kings Yasmah-Addu and Zimri-Lim. Many of the letters inform the king about extispicies performed outside the capital, either in provincial towns or on campaigns. In some cases, the senders describe the outcome of an extispicy in detail, and even announce that they will send clay models of the entrails (and sometimes the entrails themselves) to the king so he could verify the results (e.g. Durand 1988: no. 98). A few liver models were actually found together with letters sent to the king (Pongratz-Leisten 1999a: 137–154). All this suggests that the royal recipients of such letters were to some extent acquainted with the art of extispicy, and capable of critically reviewing the work performed by their diviners. Those, in turn, were often not only experts in divination, but also in charge of other important assignments. One of the most famous Mari diviners, a man named Asqudum, is known to have been sent by Zimri-Lim on a number of diplomatic, military, and administrative missions (Charpin in this volume).

The second large group of letters exchanged between kings and their scholars comes from the Late Assyrian state archives of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, who ruled in the 7th century BC. This is more than 1000 years after the end of Mari, which raises the question whether a written exchange between kings and their scholars was the rule in ancient Mesopotamia or rather an exception. All in all, it seems more likely that the lack of documentation from the indicated period is simply due to the chances of discovery, especially if one takes into account the reference, already discussed above, to the scholarly correspondence of an Isin II king in a letter from Nineveh (Parpola 1993: no. 100).

The letters and reports sent by scholars and priests to Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal have been edited by Hunger (1992), Parpola (1993), and Cole and Machinist (1998), and

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have been thoroughly discussed by Parpola (1983b). Their senders were physicians (*asû*), exorcists (*āšipu*), diviners (*bārû*), lamentation priests (*kalû*), and members of a few other professions. The letters talk about medical problems, rituals and incantations, scribal affairs, and, most importantly, ominous signs and their interpretation. The emphasis, with regard to the last, is now very much on astrology (Brown 2000). Among the letters addressing the challenges scholarly texts posed for the king, there is one by Balasi that points out: '*Šumma Izbu* (the series on malformed births) is difficult to interpret. . . . Really, [the one] who has [not] had (the meaning) pointed out to him cannot possibly understand it' (Parpola 1993: no. 60). The king needed to know everything, and accurately. One letter claims that by withholding untoward signs, scholars were responsible for king Sennacherib's affliction with an illness caused by the *alû* demon (Parpola 1993: no. 109). Most of the letters of this corpus are confined to 'scholarly' topics—the separation between the tasks of scholars and those of officials charged with political and military missions now seems more pronounced than it had been at Mari. A few letters, however (e.g. Parpola 1993: nos. 111–113), also make political recommendations. There is evidence that the Late Assyrian kings consulted not only Mesopotamian experts but also, at least occasionally, scholars from northern Syria and Egypt (Radner 2009).

Both at Mari (Durand 1988: no. 1) and in Assyria (Pongratz-Leisten 1999a: 295–320), kings seem to have tried to 'monopolize' scholarly knowledge, especially on divination, and to limit its dissemination. An anonymous letter sent to Esarhaddon (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002: no. 65) accuses a goldsmith of having hired a Babylonian to teach his son extispicy and astrology, disciplines an 'outsider' was not supposed to know. And fearful that divine encouragement might be given to his opponents, Esarhaddon tried to force his subjects through treaties and loyalty oaths (Parpola and Watanabe 1988: no. 6, ll. 108–122) to report any uncontrolled activities of prophets and dream-interpreters, who did, in fact, occasionally use their powers to undermine the king's authority (Nissinen 1998: 107–153). Esarhaddon's treaty provisions were reinterpreted, with the focus now on loyalty to god instead of the king, in the Biblical book of Deuteronomy, which warns, in chapter 13, of 'prophets or those who divine by dreams' trying to induce people 'to go after other gods'.

Despite their high status, scholars employed by kings seem not to have been particularly wealthy. Even the Assyrian chief scribe is said in a letter to have lived in a house that was so humble that even a donkey would not have entered it (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002: no. 89). And often scholars would write to a king to complain that their income was insufficient. The exorcist and physician Urad-Gula, for instance, told Assurbanipal that he had no mule, no spare set of clothing, and not even a pair of sandals (Parpola 1993: no. 294). Such complaints were certainly exaggerated. It seems to have been almost a tradition that scholars would shower their royal patrons with petitions on their own behalf in which they would display their learnedness through an unusually flowery style, sophisticated allusions to literary and religious texts, and numerous proverbial expressions. These rhetorical devices characterize Urad-Gula's Assyrian letter from the 7th century (Parpola 1987) no less than a Babylonian letter written by the needy scribe Yasitna-abum to queen Iltani in the 18th century BC (Foster 1993).

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During the Old Babylonian period, scribes sometimes sent their kings letters of petition that were written in Sumerian or had a bilingual Sumero-Akkadian format. Examples of the former include the letter of Inim-Enlila to an unnamed king, and the letter of the female scribe and princess Ninšatapada to Rim-Sin of Larsa. Together with other letters of petition, many of which addressed deities and not kings, they entered the stream of tradition and were studied in Old Babylonian schools (Hallo 1968; and see Brisch and Huber Vulliet in this volume). A remarkable bilingual letter of petition sent by a scribe (*mār bīt ṭuppi*) to king Zimri-Lim has been found at Mari; it pleads for the reinstatement of its sender to his former position (Charpin 1992). All these petitions exhibit ostentatious learning. Their existence implies that the kings of the Old Babylonian period were supposed to have an interest in Sumerian, by now essentially a language used for religious and scholarly purposes only, and to find pleasure in reading petitions by their scribes written in this language. Some Old Babylonian kings commissioned Sumerian letters of petition themselves, and addressed them to their gods. One of these communications, Sin-iddinam's letter to Utu, was still studied, in a somewhat adapted form, during the time of Assurbanipal (Borger 1991).

The important role played by first-millennium scholars of Assyrian and Babylonian kings is also reflected in texts from outside the cuneiform tradition. These texts describe the problems, and eulogize the qualities, of learned foreigners at the courts of Mesopotamian monarchs. The Aramaic Ahiqar story celebrates Ahiqar, a fictional(?) 'wise scribe' (*spr ḥkym*) of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, and the Biblical book of Daniel, written in Hebrew and Aramaic, extols the interpretative qualities of Daniel, who is presented as a scholar of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Wills 1990).

Kings as authors, patrons of new text editions, and collectors of written lore

Even though authorship was not a notion on which Mesopotamia's scribal culture put great emphasis, several literary and religious texts were ascribed to deities or famous early scribes by later tradition (Lambert 1962; Foster 1991). Some such texts were also associated with kings. The canonical *Epic of Gilgameš*, for example, on one hand attributed by ancient tradition to the scholar Sin-leqe-unninni (see above), is, on the other, presented, in its opening section, as a work that Gilgameš wrote himself (George 2003: 538–539, ll. 7–10). Modern scholars have used the label '*narû*-literature' (from *narû* 'stela, stone-inscription') to refer to literary works that pretend to represent the words of famous early kings, such as *Gilgameš*, the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin, and the Sargon Legend. In truth, these compositions originate from much later times (Pongratz-Leisten 1999b; Longman 1991).

There was also a tradition in ancient Mesopotamia to attribute medical prescriptions and magical procedures to famous rulers of the past. First-millennium texts ascribe

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ointments against certain eye diseases to Hammurabi of Babylon (Hurowitz 2005: 528), and necklaces with specific amulet stones to Naram-Sin, Hammurabi, and Marduk-nadin-ahhe of Isin (whose learned correspondence was known to Nineveh scholars, as pointed out above) (Schuster-Brandis 2008: 162–71). Furthermore, several colophons classify recipes and prescriptions for medical remedies as *niṣirti šarrūti* 'a secret of kingship' (Lenzi 2008: 185–186). That these medical and magical procedures were really all invented for (or by) kings seems unlikely, however; more probably, they became associated with the royal sphere at some later stage of their history (Lenzi 2008: 207–208). This also applies to the snake omens on a tablet from Assur characterized by the colophon as 'a secret of Šulgi, a secret of the scholar' (Lenzi 2008: 183).

The question of royal 'authorship' becomes more imminent when one looks at letters and royal inscriptions. As for the former, we have already pointed out that some royal letters were, apparently, written by the kings themselves. These were, however, the exception and not the rule. Usually, kings would meet with their personal secretaries to discuss the messages they wanted to send out. The secretaries, individuals such as Šunuhra-halu, an important advisor of king Zimri-Lim, would take notes (some of which are preserved) during these meetings and use them, once the audience was over, to write the actual letters, whose format and style followed well-defined rules (Charpin 2008: 162–167, 180–181).

Some 'royal letters', both in Sumerian and Akkadian, were studied by later scribes as part of Mesopotamia's stream of tradition. Which of these epistolary texts were based on genuine letters from the reigns of the kings with whom they are associated remains a matter of contention (Huber 2001; Frahm 2005; Hallo 2006).

The authorship of royal inscriptions poses some even greater problems. Written in the first person singular, the inscriptions try to give the impression that they were composed by no one else but the kings themselves. Several sources suggest, however, that the situation was in fact much more complex. In a letter from Mari, king Zimri-Lim asks that two drafts for a royal inscription be brought to him, one written by a certain Nab-Eštar, the other by a scribe whose name is lost. The king announces that he will read (literally, 'see') the drafts and then choose the one that seems preferable to him (Charpin 2008: 49–50, 237). In another Mari letter, the important administrator and scribe Yasim-Sumu asks king Zimri-Lim where exactly the inscriptions for two cultic vehicles should be applied (Maul 1994: 48–50). The two episodes show that, at Mari, royal inscriptions were usually composed by scribes and not by the king, but they also demonstrate that the king was consulted when a royal inscription was created.

The situation in first-millennium Assyria was probably quite similar (Tadmor 1981: 30–33). Apparently, it was, first and foremost, the royal *ummânu*, who also bore the title 'chief scribe' (*rab ṭupšarri*), who composed the inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian kings. This is explicitly stated in a famous composition of Sargon II (r. 721–705 BC), his Letter to Aššur from 714 BC. According to the colophon of this text, its actual 'author' was Nabû-šallimšunu, Sargon's chief scribe (Pongratz-Leisten 1999a: 263–265). A letter to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002; no. 125) confirms what we learn from the Letter to Aššur. The letter-writer asks that the king order his chief scribe

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'to write a royal inscription' (*narû šumu ša šarri ina libbi lišṭur*), destined for a building in the city of Adia. There is, furthermore, indirect evidence that the earliest inscriptions written in the name of Sennacherib (and perhaps also some important royal texts from the later reign of Sargon II) may have been composed by the well-known scholar Nabu-zuqup-kenu, who, while apparently not the chief scribe, belonged to a family of very influential royal scribes (Frahm 2003: 148, 157–160).

When Assyrian kings declare in their royal inscriptions that they 'wrote' them themselves, as, for instance, Esarhaddon does in one of his Assur texts (Borger 1956: 6, vii 39, *al-ṭu-ur*), we should therefore (*pace* Frame and George 2005: 279; Charpin 2008: 36) beware of uncritically accepting their claims. Kings would, after all, consider almost anything that happened under their authority as their personal achievement. But while it is clear that professional scribes played a central role in the composition of royal inscriptions, there is still a great likelihood that the kings were to some extent involved as well. Most probably, they discussed with their 'ghostwriters' which themes they wanted to include in their *res gestae* before the latter started to actually write down the texts. One can hypothesize that especially those elements of a royal inscription that transcend the topical, such as, for example, the detailed descriptions of newly introduced technologies in Sennacherib's inscriptions or Esarhaddon's very personal account of his rise to power, go back to direct interventions of the respective kings. It is, hence, not completely inaccurate to call royal inscriptions 'autobiographies' (Maul 1998) and to argue that the kings were more than mere 'honorary authors' (Toorn 2007: 33) of their *res gestae*.

Kings were also undoubtedly instrumental in sponsoring scholars who created new editions of scholarly, literary, and religious texts. We have already mentioned the patronage of activities of this kind by Šulgi, Nazi-Maruttaš, and Nebuchadnezzar I. Another important case is that of the Isin II king Adad-apla-iddina. Later tradition claims that the well-known scholar Esangila-kin-apli produced new editions of the diagnostic handbook *Sakikkû* and the physiognomic treatise *Alamdimmû* under his rule, and that those texts were meant to be used primarily by the king (Finkel 1988). An important manual of exorcistic and divinatory works (Geller 2000: 242–254) is attributed to Esangila-kin-apli as well, suggesting that he might also have worked on other scholarly texts. Parts of the manual are written in a rather enigmatic Sumerianizing orthography reminiscent of Adad-apla-iddina's 'crypto-Sumerian' royal inscriptions (Frahm 2001), which may well have been composed by no one else but Esangila-kin-apli himself. Another scholar (or was he identical with Esangila-kin-apli?) from the reign of Adad-apla-iddina, Saggil-kinam-ubbib, was the author of the Babylonian Theodicy (Lambert 1962: 66–67; Foster 2005: 914–922; Beaulieu 2007: 12–14). Even though all the sources mentioning the editorial work that took place under Adad-apla-iddina date to the first millennium, they are probably quite trustworthy, since there was no reason to falsely attribute the final editions of some of Mesopotamia's most important texts to a reign that, politically, was rather insignificant (Radner 2007).

The Assyrian king Assurbanipal claims in a number of colophons (Hunger 1968: no. 321) that he personally created a new edition (*zarâ ṣabātu*) of the botanical handbook

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Uruanna. This edition (which profited, most probably, to a significant extent from the input of Assurbanipal's scholars) consisted of twelve excerpt-tablets (*nishu*) replacing the four tablets of the earlier version (pers. comm. B. Böck).

In addition to 'authoring' texts and commissioning new editions, Mesopotamian kings demonstrated their scholarly ambitions through the creation of large personal libraries. Not many of these tablet collections have been excavated (Pedersén 1998: 262–265), but some that have not been retrieved are mentioned in the textual record. A subscript on a medical tablet from Assur (Köcher 1970: no. 322, obv. 29; Hurowitz 2005: 529–530) and a short note in a letter from Nineveh (Parpola 1993: no. 155) suggest that there was, in Babylon, a library once associated with king Hammurabi that was still accessible in the first millennium BC. Another royal(?) library in Babylon was looted in 1215 BC by the troops of Tukulti-Ninurta I, who probably used the Babylonian tablets to create his own library in Assur (see above). Ernst Weidner suggested, in an influential article (Weidner 1952–53), that Tiglath-pileser I had a large personal tablet collection as well. Recent research (see Pedersén 1998: 84) has shown that many of the tablets Weidner assigned to this library were actually written long before Tiglath-pileser came to power, but a few tablets may indeed originate from a library owned by that king. Found in the Old Palace at Assur, one of them bears the subscript *ša ekalli* 'from the palace' (Maul 2003). Another Assyrian king interested in assembling scholarly tablets was Esarhaddon, who inaugurated a programme of copying learned texts at Nineveh (Frame and George 2005: 278–279). His personal tablet collection is referred to in the subscript of a medical text (Köcher 1970: no. 322, rev. 91).

The most substantial royal libraries discovered in the ruins of ancient Mesopotamia are the tablet collections established by king Assurbanipal in the Southwest Palace, the North Palace, and Nabu's temple on Kuyunjik, the citadel of Nineveh. In addition to thousands of royal inscriptions, letters, and administrative and legal documents, *c*. 16,750 tablets and fragments of religious, literary, and scholarly content, most of them specifically copied for Assurbanipal's library, have been found on Kuyunjik. Nearly all of them are now in the British Museum (Pedersén 1998: 158–165). Assurbanipal was particularly interested in collecting texts from Babylonia. During the first years of his reign, he wrote to leading scholars in Babylon and Borsippa and asked them to send him *kullat ṭupšarrūti* 'the entire corpus of scribal learning.' This included omen texts, rituals and incantations, liturgical works, and belles-lettres (Lieberman 1990; Frame and George 2005; Frahm 2005). The Babylonian scholars, who received significant monetary incentives for their work (one letter mentions the proud sum of 60 kg of silver), copied their texts on wooden writing-boards and dispatched them to Nineveh, where Assyrian scribes copied them in Assyrian script on clay tablets destined for the royal libraries. Some tablets from the collections of well known Assyrian scholars, for example the Kalhu scribe Nabu-zuqup-kenu, who was active between 716 and 683 BC, were likewise incorporated into Assurbanipal's libraries (Baker and Pearce 2001; Figure 24.4).

Between 652 and 648 BC, a protracted war between Assurbanipal and his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin, king of Babylon, brought relations between Assyria and Babylonia to

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FIGURE 24.4 Reverse of a clay tablet, with an oracle query, originally owned by Nabu-zuqup-kenu (whose name is mentioned in the colophon), but later transferred to the library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh (British Museum, K 2608 + K 2633 + K 3101b + K 3435). (Photo by Mikko Luukko. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

a dramatic low. When he had finally defeated the Babylonians, Assurbanipal seems to have changed his methods of acquiring library materials. Instead of genially asking Babylonian scholars to send him tablets voluntarily, he now had them confiscated. In 647, large numbers of clay tablets and writing-boards were removed from various Babylonian libraries and transferred to Assyria, where librarians created long inventories of them (Parpola 1983a; Fincke 2003–04).

When the Babylonians and Medes conquered and destroyed Nineveh in 612 BC, Assurbanipal's libraries were buried under large mounds of debris. One of the king's library tablets, however, emerged, in the course of modern excavations, not at Nineveh, but in the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk, among the tablets of a Babylonian exorcist who was active during the time of Alexander the Great (Farber 1987: 35). Whether it had left Nineveh as booty in 612 or somewhat earlier as a royal gift, the fact that Babylonian scholars handed down an Assurbanipal library tablet over a period of 300 years clearly indicates (as do the late copies of letters exchanged between Assurbanipal and the scribes of Babylon and Borsippa that we have mentioned above) that this learned Assyrian king never ceased to fascinate the Babylonian *literati*.

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The impact of the king on Mesopotamia's intellectual discourse

Was there ever any opposition on the part of the scribes against the kings' massive interference in matters related to literature and scholarship? The evidence for such resistance is slim, and it only concerns individual abuses, never royal meddling in scribal affairs in general. A tablet from Uruk dated to 251 BC claims that Šulgi of Ur, with the help of his 'chief ideologue' (*ummânu*) Lu-Nanna (the 'author' of the *Etana* epic according to later tradition), had blasphemously transferred the rites of the god Anu of Uruk to the cult of the moon-god Sin in Ur, and had left behind an inscription full of lies. The text may well be a disguised critique of another learned king, Nabonidus, whose sponsorship of the cult of the moon-god angered many Babylonian priests and scholars (Cavigneaux 2005, with earlier literature). Nabonidus is more openly and explicitly criticized for what his opponents regarded as pseudo-scholarship in another text, the so-called Verse Account (Schaudig 2001: 563–578). Perhaps in reference to claims that Nabonidus had been a master-interpreter of the astrological series *Enūma Anu Enlil* (see above), the Verse Account puts into the king's mouth the words: 'I may not know cuneiform, but I have seen the hidden (*mihiṣ qānṭuppi ul īdi ātamar n*[*iṣirtu*]). (As for the series) *Uskār Anu Enlil*, which Adapa compiled—I surpass it in all wisdom.' In this passage, the author first discloses the pretentious nature of Nabonidus's literary ambitions by alleging that the king was, in fact, illiterate, and then pokes fun at his devotion to the moon-god by calling the astrological series Nabonidus said he knew so well 'Lunar crescent (*uskāru*) of Anu and Enlil' instead of the actual 'series "When Anu and Enlil"' (*iškar Enūma Anu Enlil*) (Machinist and Tadmor 1993).

One Mesopotamian text, the so-called *Advice to a Prince* (Foster 2005: 867–869), which was studied as part of the terrestrial omen series *Šumma Ālu* (Freedman 1998: 21, 323, iii 21), but also in connection with texts such as the Laws of Hammurabi (Lambert 1989: 95–96), provides a number of general rules that limit royal power. To avoid divine wrath, the king is, among other things, supposed to pay attention to his magnates and, of course, his *ummânu*-scholars, be just, and keep the privileges of the ancient Babylonian temple-cities in place. Even the *Advice to a Prince*, however, is not the product of a truly independent critical mind; together with a few other texts criticizing individual kings, including the aforementioned ones directed against Nabonidus, it seems to represent the point of view of the temple.

Earlier Assyriologists (e.g. Landsberger 1960: 111) stressed that Mesopotamian monarchs depended heavily on the knowledge of their scribes. That the kings profited from their close alliance with them can indeed hardly be denied—after all, the scribes created and disseminated the main tenets of Mesopotamian royal ideology. In the light of the preceding discussion, it seems, however, as if the dependency the other way round was much more pronounced. Mesopotamian scholars, despite their occasional lamentations about being neglected, were remunerated by the palace or the temple (which was to a

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large extent controlled by the crown) and enjoyed a fairly high status thanks to their association with these institutions. But they had to pay a price for these privileges: they were obliged to make sure that their intellectual activities met their patrons' needs. To engage in truly independent forms of investigation was not an option for them. The close association between scholars and kings thus prevented the emergence, in ancient Mesopotamia, of more radical lines of study and of more critical forms of scholarship that could have triggered or accelerated political and cultural change. Ancient Mesopotamia, it seems, was no fertile ground for the autonomous, unattached individual thinkers or 'intellectuals' who, according to Karl Jaspers (1949), brought about the 'axial revolutions' of the period between 800 and 200 BC that took place in China, India and the eastern Mediterranean (Oppenheim 1975; Michalowski 2005). Unlike their colleagues in those regions, the Babylonian and Assyrian *literati* were never able to shake off the influence of the palace and the temple, which managed to control and essentially monopolize what Michael Mann (1986) has defined as 'ideological power'.

Conclusion

A thousand years after cuneiform culture came to an end, Nizam al-Mulk (AD 1018?–1092), the chief minister of the Saljuq kings Alp Arslan and Malikshah and author of the *Siyāsatnāma*, the Book of Government, quoted an intriguing aphorism regarding the relationship between rulers and scholars:

> The best of rulers is he who keeps company with men of learning, and the worst of learned men is he who seeks the society of the ruler. (Darke 1978: 60)

These words still ring quite true. The *literati* of ancient Mesopotamia, however, would probably not have felt much inclination to subscribe to them. There is no indication that they regarded their dependency on the king as anything but natural. Even when Babylonia lost its political autonomy in 539 BC, cuneiform culture continued to be based on a more and more anachronistic body of highly 'regocentric' texts, now used to construct what has been described as an 'imaginary community' (Beaulieu 2006: 213). Unsurprisingly, this corpus became increasingly esoteric, and, with the gap between the texts and the political realities growing larger and larger, eventually disappeared—in pronounced contrast to the deeply anti-monarchical corpus of Biblical texts, which became the foundation of entirely new civilizations.

Further reading

Recent studies dealing with the scribal and intellectual ambitions of individual Mesopotamian kings include Krispijn (1990) and Rubio (2006) on Šulgi, Fincke (2003–04), Frahm (2004),

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Frame and George (2005), and Livingstone (2007) on Assurbanipal and his library, and Machinist and Tadmor (1993) and Schaudig (2002) on Nabonidus. Visicato (2000) discusses the relationship between governing elites and scribes during the earliest phases of Mesopotamian history. For kings as sponsors of editorial projects, see Lambert (1962), Finkel (1988), and Beaulieu (2007). Durand (1988) explores the scholarly correspondence of the rulers of Mari, while Parpola (1983b) examines that of the Late Assyrian kings. An excellent overview of the role of writing in Mesopotamia in general, and especially among its ruling elites, is Charpin (2008). Michalowski (2005), in his discussion of the limitations of Mesopotamian scholarship, provides some thoughts on the influence Mesopotamian rulers exerted on the arts and sciences.

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CHAPTER 25

FROM STREET ALTAR TO PALACE: READING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF URBAN BABYLONIA

HEATHER D. BAKER

The city of Babylon is traditionally seen as the central stage for the expression of Babylonian royal ideology: it was where the king built his monumental structures, where he maintained his primary residence, and where he participated in key religious festivals. The ideological messages which the built environment of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon conveyed 'on a cosmic and political level' to the people, whether visitors or inhabitants, have been eloquently examined in a thought-provoking article by van de Mieroop (2003). In this chapter I seek to add another dimension to this approach by addressing the experience of urban living from the point of view of the people who were the ordinary inhabitants of Babylon and the other cities of southern Mesopotamia, and to contrast their perspective with the 'high-level' ideals projected by the ruler. In order to do so, it is necessary to shift the emphasis away from the monumental sectors of the city and towards the residential quarters and other, more marginal areas. These have rarely been considered as a vector for ideological messages, but they nevertheless served as such. To 'read' them, however, requires a more subtle approach than has hitherto been employed. In line with this shift of spatial focus, it is necessary to concentrate less on the 'elevated' writings commemorating the king's great building works than on the more mundane written and archaeological sources which, while lacking any overt ideological message, nevertheless reflect ideological values.

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Methodology: Finding a way into the Babylonian city

In his review of a volume of conference proceedings entitled *Die orientalische Stadt* (Wilhelm 1997), van de Mieroop (2000) stressed the urgent need for a new model of the ancient Near Eastern city to replace the traditional approach, which, echoing Liverani's contribution to that same volume (Liverani 1997), he considered to be rooted in an outdated, orientalist mentality.

There is another scholarly trend of recent decades which is potentially liable to criticism along similar lines. I am referring here to the growing body of works on the theme of 'architecture and power'. Contributions to this ongoing debate from scholars of the ancient Near East have been concerned primarily with the monumental sectors of the built environment. To this genre of study belong the books by Heinz (1997a) and Novák (1999) which—from different perspectives—are concerned with urban spatial organization and planning and their relationship to the socio-political structure; both authors are also among the contributors to *Die orientalische Stadt* (Heinz 1997b; Novák 1997). More recently, the ancient Near East has been well represented in a couple of conference volumes on this same theme of power and architecture (Maran et al. 2006; Bretschneider et al. 2007). It is worth noting that the earlier of these, covering a wide range of periods and places, contains only one contribution which is concerned with power in the context of domestic architecture (Johnson 2006). Thus it is not only in ancient Near Eastern studies that a 'top-down' approach to this subject has so far prevailed.

By virtue of their focus on monumentality, and hence on royal power, the ancient Near Eastern contributions to this discourse on 'architecture and power' lay themselves open to the charge of being preoccupied with oriental despotism, however far removed that may be from the actual intentions of the author(s). In spite of this legitimate concern, scholarly attempts to understand monumental architecture by reference to ruler ideology cannot be discarded simply because one is uncomfortable with the prominence necessarily afforded to the strong king. On the other hand, to see Mesopotamian monumental architecture as a system of signs whereby 'the sender of the message was the ruling political system' (Novák 1999: xxiii) is to relegate the urban population and visiting observers to an entirely passive role as recipients of royal ideology. It is a question of balance. In developing a new model for the ancient Near Eastern city it is necessary first to formulate an approach to interpreting monumental architecture that acknowledges the role of the audience. Second, the model ought not to overemphasize the monumental elements of urban form, but rather ought to take full account of other, non-monumental sectors of the city where the agency of the king as planner was much less—if at all—in evidence. Moreover, while monumentality is a 'sign' of an overt kind, it is as well to bear in mind that other architectural signs are likely to be of more subtle, even unconscious, character and intent.

In recent work I have tried to address the concerns outlined above by formulating an approach which attempts to reconstruct the Babylonian cities of the first millennium

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BC 'from the bottom up', focusing especially on the non-monumental sectors of the city and on the ways in which the local inhabitants shaped their immediate environment (Baker forthcoming). The present study builds on the results of this work in order further to investigate the semiotics of the built environment. As its starting point, it poses a number of questions: What role did architecture and urban form play in the reproduction and transmission of social values and social structures outside of the city's monumental core? Is it possible to 'read' social inequalities (such as class, gender, etc.) in the built environment? Questions such as these will be explored in a preliminary fashion, with the aim of raising issues for further, detailed discussion. My observations relate primarily to the first millennium BC, with occasional references to earlier periods for the sake of highlighting potentially significant chronological developments.

Reading (and writing) the city

Out of all the cuneiform sources referring in one way or another to the urban environment, the royal inscriptions are surely the most familiar. However, as already stated, my main concern here is with attempting to reconstruct other views of the city than the one projected by the king, so I shall not dwell on these inscriptions. The so-called 'literary-topographical' texts, which collect together the ceremonial names of urban topographic features, similarly focus primarily on the monumental structures, especially the temples and ziggurats. According to Andrew George, who has studied these compositions in detail:

> These texts seek to glorify the religious and cosmological importance of a city . . . by the compendious collection of traditional city epithets, and the exhaustive listing of every kind of sacred structure, from the great temples down to the merest shrine. It is by these means that the texts of this genre presented demonstrative and conclusive evidence of a city's religious and cosmological pre-eminence. (George 1992: 4)

These, then, are elevated writings deriving from the highest levels of scribal culture. Our problem is that all of the references to the city and its constituent parts in the Mesopotamian sources are by definition a product of the elite scribal milieu, and so it is difficult to extract from them any kind of 'popular' attitude(s) towards city-dwelling. Aside from the 'literary-topographical' genre, the built environment crops up in a number of other kinds of text. Among the divination literature, for example, the series *Šumma Ālu* contains many omens pertaining to the physical fabric of the city or house (Freedman 1998), as does *Iqqur Īpuš*. *Šumma Ālu* is concerned with the implications of 'the ominous signs that occur inside and around the boundaries of man's created environment' (Guinan 1989: 226), while *Iqqur Īpuš* focuses on the appropriate times of the year for undertaking the activities involved in constructing or renovating a house (Guinan 1996: 62 n. 2). The house omens have been investigated by Guinan (1989; 1996), who observes: 'Because the house is situated at the juncture of separate domains (nature and culture, individual and society, public and private, inside and outside, leaving and

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returning) it is a natural venue for the observation of omens' (Guinan 1996: 62). She stresses that many of the house omens of *Šumma Ālu* are associated with liminal contexts, either physically or metaphorically. Some omens appear to reflect social norms—for example, a house encroaching on a public street or city square was unpropitious for its owners—but others seem to conform to the tradition among omen compendia that Veldhuis (2006: 497) considers to represent 'a scholarly and speculative discourse of their own'. In the light of this he cautions against trying to extrapolate a 'Babylonian worldview' from the divinatory corpus. Above all, a sensitive reading of context, as exemplified by Guinan's work, is necessary in order to interpret not only those omens which are susceptible to 'straightforward resolution' but also the numerous others which are not. As an example of the latter, Guinan (1989: 234–235) draws attention to omens which actually subvert traditional 'messages', such as the city whose towering monumental structures actually portend evil for the inhabitants.

Aside from the 'literary-topographical' texts, the corpus of everyday documents, especially the legal contracts, forms an important source of information on urban topography. These tablets have a less overt agenda since they were drawn up according to the needs of the moment, to record transactions being made for the most part between private individuals. They were written by trained scribes. Although I have characterized these above as belonging to the elite, in fact some qualification is needed, since it is clear that there was a great deal of variation in the level of scribal education attained by individual practitioners. Though impossible to quantify, it seems that a basic level of literacy was surprisingly widespread among adult males, at least those of the urban middle and upper echelons of society: for example, out of the 214 legal documents from the Nappahu archive of 6th–early 5th century Babylon where the name of a scribe is preserved, no fewer than 149 were written by different individuals (Baker 2004: 16–17). However, the kinds of tablets which provide the most detailed information about urban properties, namely, the land sale and related contracts, were generally written by highly trained scribes on account of their complex formulary. These include the restricted group of scribes or 'notaries' who were responsible for drawing up the sealed land sale contracts (Baker and Wunsch 2001). Though such formal contracts served most immediately the requirements of the parties involved, they were also susceptible to political influence which affected the conventions used in measuring and describing the properties in question (Baker 2011). The actual property descriptions use certain topographical terms which are known also from other text genres, and it can be assumed that they were actually used in daily life. The names for individual city districts (Akk. *erṣetu*) are one such case: they occur frequently in the documents as a way of describing the location of individual properties, and they are known also from the aforementioned literary-topographical texts concerned with Babylon, especially the series *Tintir = Babylon* where each of the ten districts of Babylon is described with reference to two boundary points (George 1992: 68–70: Tintir V, 92–104). This makes it clear that the district names were not simply casual designations for a part of the city, but were rather formal divisions with a reality on the ground that was apprehended by the population at large. Similarly, the major public streets which crossed the residential quarters are conventionally

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termed 'broad street, way of the gods and the king' (Akk. *sūqu rapšu mūtaq ilī u šarri*) in the everyday documents. This was not merely a popular appellation, as is clear from the fact that very similar phrasing is used in a royal inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 604–562 BC): *sūqu rapšu mūtaq bēli rabî Marduk*, 'broad street, way of the great lord Marduk' (Langdon 1912: 160, vii 45–46). The same passage also refers (ll. 49–50) to the 'broad street, way of the princely son Nabu'. In the everyday documents too, as in this inscription, major public streets are occasionally identified as the processional streets of specific deities (Uraš, Nabu and Nanaya, and Nergal; for references see Oppenheim and Reiner 1977: 298). This conceptualization of the street network, whereby major public streets—(processional) ways of the gods—and lesser public streets—ways of the people (Akk. *sūqu qatnu mūtaq nišī*, 'narrow street, way of the people')—is apparently an innovation of the first millennium BC and is found only in Babylonia. However, it did not actually originate with Nebuchadnezzar II, since the expressions discussed above are attested in Uruk at least as early as the mid-7th century BC.

The everyday documents mentioning urban properties are most commonly concerned with completed houses (*bītu epšu*), derelict houses (*bītu abtu*), and unbuilt plots (*kišubbû*). A great deal of work has been devoted to relating the physical characteristics of such properties to their conditions of ownership and use, and to the archaeological evidence for contemporary housing (e.g. Baker forthcoming). Occasionally we can trace the history of a single property over several decades, witnessing changes in the immediate surroundings and, sometimes, in its physical state. Our record is somewhat biased in that our most detailed descriptions concern houses under private ownership, however small. The dwellings of those who could not afford to own their own property remain more poorly known simply because the rental contracts give very few details of the houses in question. This is not to say that housing was only ever rented by the poorest sector of society—this was certainly not the case, since even the wealthiest entrepreneurial families sometimes had reason to rent houses from others—but it is clear that the tenant class must have included a great many people who simply had no alternative.

The actual work of construction or reconstruction remains almost entirely undocumented, except for occasional references to building materials or labour. There is a single contract known to me which concerns the employment of a master-builder (*arad-ekalli*) for the purpose of constructing a house (BM 64392, written in 324 BC; edited by Stolper 1993: 70–73, with a revised interpretation and edition in Baker forthcoming).

Despite the dearth of direct written sources for house-building, there are building rituals associated with every stage of construction, from the initial laying of foundations to the final purification of the completed structure prior to its occupation. However, in his detailed study of these texts Ambos (2004: 65) notes that no distinction was made by the scholars between temple- and house-building rituals. It is difficult to determine the extent to which such rituals were employed—if at all—in the course of regular construction work on private houses. However, with regard to the foundation deposits of apotropaic figurines which were regularly made in monumental buildings, Ellis (1968: 164) could list only five instances known to him where these had been deliberately deposited

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in a private house. Out of these five cases, only one came from Babylonia. It consisted of figurines deposited within two baked brick capsules in a part of the South Palace of Nebuchadnezzar II, dubbed 'Haus 38' (see Figure 25.1), located at the northeast corner of the Westhof sector (Koldewey 1931: 99 and pl. 18). Ellis followed the excavators in calling this unit a house, but despite the general similarity of the numerous 'house-like' architectural units within Nebuchadnezzar's palace to domestic dwellings, I believe it is a mistake to see them as private houses, as Ellis apparently did. From this revised interpretation it follows that the placing of foundation figurines was a royal prerogative which was not emulated by private Babylonian citizens.

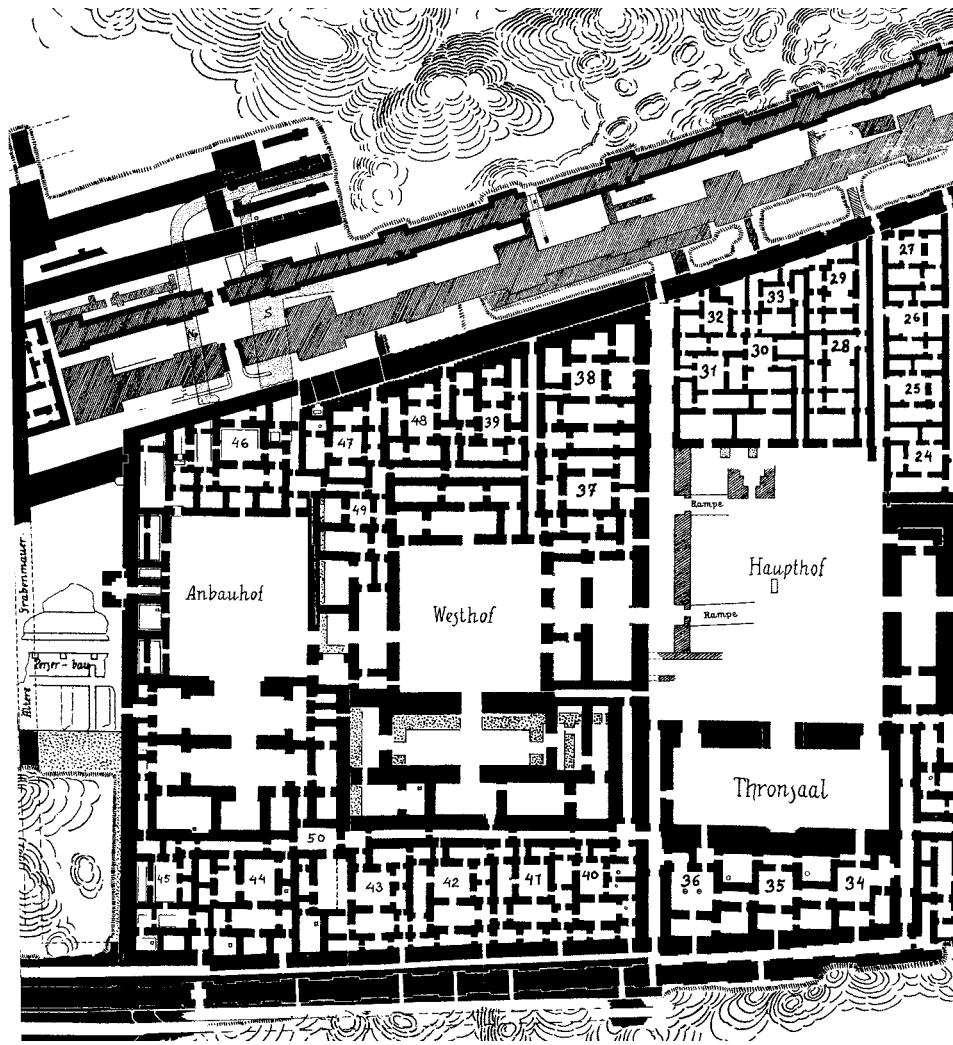

FIGURE 25.1 The western part of Nebuchadnezzar's South Palace at Babylon: Haus 38 is located in the northeast corner of the Westhof sector. (Drawing reproduced from Koldewey 1931 pl. 2: Die Südburg).

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Closer examination of these architectural units within the palace reveals significant differences in their configuration compared with private houses, and it is more likely that they accommodated the various administrative and other functions central to the running of the palace. They may well have also accommodated some of the lower-ranking palace personnel or slaves, but this was surely secondary to their main function as working areas. A key feature distinguishing these 'houses' from private houses proper is their greater permeability: private houses typically had only one entrance, while these units were normally accessible via several different routes leading from different directions. This factor above all else rules out a private function, to my mind, since the layout of contemporary private houses betrays a clear preoccupation with privacy, as stressed by Guinan (1996: 61). Moreover, the rooms around the central courtyards of these units are permeable, in contrast to the private houses where we tend to find a series of self-contained suites and rooms which could only be accessed via the courtyard. Also, these house-like units frequently have an entrance which affords a direct line of sight through to the central courtyard, something which the private houses typically avoid. Finally, the main residential suites of this period—whether in a private house, palace, or temple (cella suite)—were characterized by a wall significantly thicker than usual separating that suite from the adjacent courtyard. In these house-like units, however, none of the suites are marked out in this way.

The interpretative problem that I have identified here arises from a general reliance in Mesopotamian architecture, regardless of scale and complexity, on a basic, easily replicated scheme—a central courtyard enclosed by suites of rooms—which lends a superficially similar appearance to units of widely varying configuration and function. It is necessary to 'read' these buildings with a more critical eye, paying particular attention to factors such as accessibility and context. For example, it is possible to show that in Babylon there were 'houses' located in a non-residential setting, and also in that city there are excavated buildings which have conventionally been interpreted as houses but which were more likely workshops/storerooms associated with Ištar-of-Akkad's temple in Merkes, corresponding to the structures known in Akkadian as *šutummus* (Baker in press). These revised interpretations of the built environment rely upon a close reading of both archaeological and written sources in combination.

Size matters

There is a great deal of variation in the size of houses attested in the Babylonian cities of the first millennium BC (Baker 2004: 57–62; Baker forthcoming: chapter 5). A large house clearly served as an indicator of status: at Old Babylonian Larsa, for example, local merchant families acquired contiguous small urban plots in order to build a large house which symbolized their success (Charpin 2003: 318), and similar observations have been made for the families of Old Assyrian merchants operating in Cappadocia (Veenhof 1977: 116). There is no reason to think that the situation was any different in the first

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millennium BC. However, a large house was not merely a sign of high office or a flourishing commercial enterprise, it was also a necessity: for such house-owners as these, their residence served also as their place of work, or as the base for their various enterprises. Compare, for example, the Neo-Assyrian case: Postgate (2007: 353–357) has argued convincingly that the buildings (apart from the palaces) that housed government administration 'were probably "houses" of one kind or another'. In his view the expression 'Masters' House' (*bēt bēlē*) corresponds to a governmental department as seen from the point of view of the employee vis-à-vis his administrative superiors. Postgate writes (2007: 356): 'However it arose, in the phrase "Masters' House" *bētu* plainly refers to an administrative department, although that does not necessarily mean that there was not an identifiable building with the same designation.'

This scenario very likely applies also to first-millennium Babylonia, where we may indeed be dealing with identifiable buildings (Baker forthcoming). For example, I believe that the two especially large and complex three-courtyard 'houses' excavated at Babylon west of the Greek theatre (Al-Bayati 1985) and at the site of Abū Qubūr in northern Babylonia (Gasche et al. 1989; Gasche 1991) represent the residences/bureaux of high officials. Moreover, the close similarity in size (*c.* 2,000 m^2) and layout of these two buildings gives rise to the suspicion that there was a kind of 'blueprint' for this type of residence/official bureau. It is worth noting that these structures both occupy an entire block: a well-defined perimeter wall is characteristic of palaces (Postgate 2003–05: 196) but is not found among the houses of this period, with the exception of House 1 at Ur (Woolley 1962: 46–47, pl. 71). This is supported by the textual evidence since, among the written descriptions of properties, I know of no case of a house occupying an entire block. The excavated evidence for residential areas indicates that private houses were inserted into the pre-existing street network, occupying the space available to the plot in question. However, these two 'residences', by contrast, must have occupied sites specially cleared to accommodate them (though still respecting the general street alignments) since they are surrounded on all sides by public space. Thus, a higher level of planning is indicated, which lends support to the idea proposed here that they served an official function.

In the case of these two 'residences' we are dealing with structures which are larger than the biggest houses known from the residential districts of Babylon and Ur, and smaller than the only building so far identifiable as a seat of local government, the so-called Palace of Bel-šalti-Nanna (sometimes called the Palace of the Entu-Priestesses) at Ur, which measured *c.* 5743 m^2 in area (Woolley & Mallowan 1962: 41–43, pl. 70). It seems clear that a traditional typological approach whereby buildings such as these are classified simply as larger, more complex dwellings does not do justice to the greater degree of functional complexity and the vastly increased possibilities for the spatial differentiation of activity areas that they present. Though they fall between the larger dwellings at one end of the size range and the palaces at the other end, in terms of their spatial organization they probably had more in common with the latter. In the case of the Achaemenid Residence at Abū Qubūr, the influence of palace architecture has been noted by Miglus (2003–05: 255), and the very name assigned to the building by its excavators betrays their thoughts about its function.

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Seen in a wider perspective, the housing of the first millennium BC exhibits a far greater degree of variability in size and complexity when compared with that of the earlier second millennium in Babylonia. The largest excavated dwellings of the first millennium (House I at Ur, Haus III in Babylon, Merkes), measuring 1490 m^2 and 1475 m^2 respectively, are over twice as big as the largest known Old Babylonian house, the Grand Bâtiment at Sippar-Amnanum, at 700 m^2 (based on the figures presented by Miglus 1999: 329–331, table 12, 341, table 27). Moreover, average (excavated) house size had increased rather dramatically, from *c.* 152 m^2 to *c.* 417 m^2. These developments imply not only a general improvement in urban living conditions, but also an unprecedented degree of social inequality.

Having established that house size was associated with status and also with greater complexity of function, it is worth considering how size might have been perceived by the city-dwellers aside from the actual occupants. The visual differentiation of houses by size may not always have been readily appreciated by passers-by, especially since housing normally presented a continuous, blank, unadorned façade to the outside. This is especially the case where party walls divided one dwelling from the next, because in such instances it would not have been possible to determine from the outside where the external wall of one house ended and that of its neighbour began. It is clear that the presence or absence of party walls is a factor which correlates with status (Baker forthcoming): the Neo-Babylonian houses of the relatively high-status Merkes area of Babylon lack party walls, whereas the houses associated with the Eanna temple at Uruk habitually share party walls with their neighbours. In districts where housing was generally smaller and more crowded, the use of party walls between adjacent dwellings also freed up a significant amount of land. In Merkes the excavated houses always have an external wall which is unbroken save for the doorway(s) (Reuther 1926: pl. 17; see Figure 25.2 for a modern impression of one of these houses). Moreover, often a narrow gap was left between adjacent houses, so that an external wall was not built directly up against that of a neighbour. This technique may have been primarily aimed at maintaining the integrity of the individual plot, but the unintended(?) consequence was that the division between houses was visible to the passer-by, in the form of a narrow slit between dwellings. In these cases, then, house size could be more easily perceived by the observant pedestrian, and it would have been clear to him or her that the occupants had no need to resort to party walls. In other respects houses would have looked the same from the outside: differences in construction techniques and quality—again, the Merkes houses stand out in this respect—would have been obscured by the universal practice of coating the wall surfaces with mud plaster, thus achieving a uniform external appearance. In fact, the evidence of omen texts supports the notion that it was considered desirable for a house to have a plain exterior. Omens in the collection *Šumma Ālu* contrast external appearance with the concealed outcome, for example: 'If the structure of the house on the outside is alluring, it will not endure', and 'If the structure of a house is unprepossessing, its inhabitants will be happy' (Guinan 1989: 233). Upper storeys are only rarely attested, so in terms of elevation too houses would have presented a rather uniform appearance.

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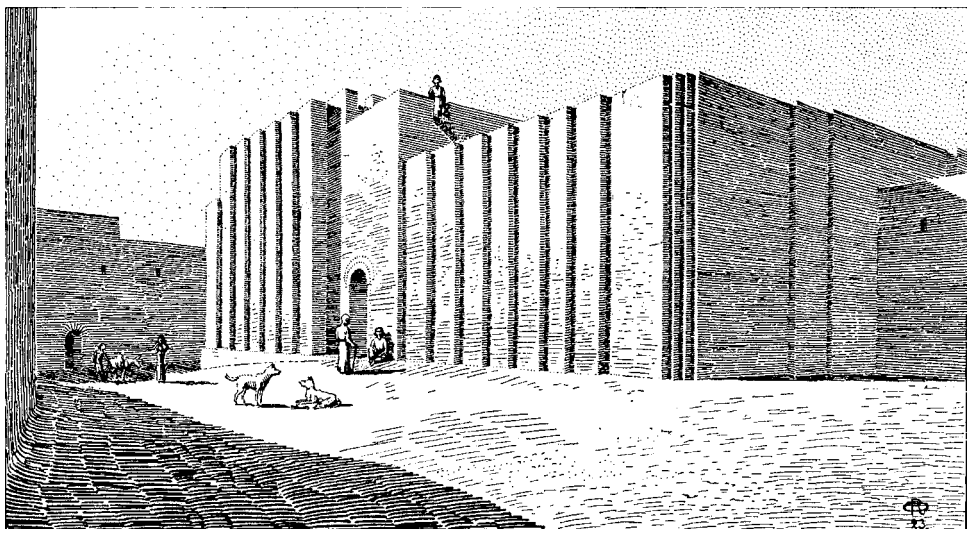

FIGURE 25.2 Reconstruction drawing of housing in Merkes, Babylon. (Drawing by O. Reuther, reproduced from Reuther 1926: 97, Abb. 68: Haus III von Nordwesten).

Location, location, location

It is a commonplace in modern Western urbanism that wealthy, high-status residents typically abandon the city centre for the periphery, leaving the central areas with the highest land values to capital-rich commercial enterprises and, conversely, the most run-down inner city districts to the urban poor (at least until rising property values lead to gentrification). However, in ancient Mesopotamia it is likely that the urban elite reinforced their status by physical proximity to the centres of power. This hypothesis is difficult to test owing to the lack of adequate archaeological exploration of the urban margins, but at least this appears to have been the case with the Merkes district of Babylon, which certainly housed well-to-do citizens. The lack of blind alleys in the excavated sector of Merkes is noteworthy. It has been observed elsewhere that alleys are underrepresented in the excavated residential districts since they do not occur with the frequency that we would expect, judging from the numerous references to them in the everyday documents (Baker 2007: 70). It may be significant that those inhabitants who can be assumed to have played a prominent role in public life, whether as higher officials or as well-to-do entrepreneurs, appear to have lived in houses that were more fully integrated into the network of public space. By this I mean that, at the outer perimeter of the building blocks, houses adjoined, and were accessible from, public streets rather than blind alleys. Similarly, Harris (1975: 22) noted that the better houses of Old Babylonian Sippar were typically located on a street or even in the city square. It seems that the wealthier inhabitants retained all the trappings of privacy which the conventional house

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design afforded them, but that their houses tended to be accessible by more direct routes, compared with the more convoluted means of access preferred by their poorer peers living in more densely crowded districts. In occupying a more prominent position with respect to public space, the wealthier houses emulated the royal palaces and temples. Additional signs of differentiation between residential neighbourhoods will be discussed below.

In a world of one's own: Forming communities

In discussions of Mesopotamian residential districts it has often been observed that they represent a social mix, with the houses of wealthier inhabitants being surrounded by those of their poorer compatriots. For example, Stone (2007: 162) writes of residential districts 'composed of large well-appointed houses with small, poorly furnished houses nestled between them, and occasional shops'. This model of neighbourhoods with poor and rich living cheek by jowl has been compared with that found in the traditional Islamic cities (Stone 2007: 164). For the first millennium, however, there is some evidence that certain classes of society resided in separate districts. In Uruk and Babylon, if not elsewhere, it is clear that a good many members of the middle-ranking temple personnel lived in housing which was actually enclosed within the greater temple precinct (Baker in press). It is also clear that the houses in question display a much greater homogeneity in terms of their size, with an average of *c.* 240 m^2 (for those associated with Eanna and Esangila) when seen against the size range of the excavated houses in general. Miglus (1999: 206) also noted this relative homogeneity in the size of the houses associated with the Eanna temple at Uruk, and suggested that it might be owed to a regular parcellation of land. This may well be true; however, the irregular shape of the plots themselves, and of the street network, suggests that any such parcellation scheme was superimposed on a pre-existing street pattern. These relatively homogeneous communities housed within the temple precincts may be contrasted with the inhabitants of Babylon, Merkes, who surely represent the upper echelons of urban society, as evidenced by the size and quality of their housing, and to some extent by the archival material found in this quarter (Baker 2008: 109–114). As a model which departs significantly from that of the mixed neighbourhoods stressed by Stone, this evidence for segregation by social group/class is of some importance for understanding the character of the Babylonian cities in the later periods. Stone herself (1987: 123–131; 2007: 164) draws attention to clear differences in character between the TA and TB areas of Nippur, and between the EM and AH areas at Ur (as noted also by earlier scholars). However, in spite of these differences she maintains: 'The evidence is overwhelming that differences in wealth and power existed within neighborhoods rather than between them' (Stone 2007: 164). It may well be, then, that the emergence in the first millennium of local communities

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whose members belonged to a certain class of people represents a significant development. Nevertheless, the picture is complex. Detailed investigation of the social composition of city districts in Hellenistic Uruk has revealed significant variability across the city: the districts directly associated with the major temples in the heart of the city, Reš and Ešgal, consisted entirely of personnel occupying quasi-tenured properties designated *bīt ritti*, while some of the other districts further afield were considerably more mixed (Baker forthcoming). It seems quite likely, therefore, that both kinds of local communities—socially mixed and socially segregated—could be found in the same city at the same time.

Beyond the temple walls: The spatial context of religious practice

It is a truism that the Mesopotamian temples were not accessible to the public at large, and that access was increasingly restricted the closer one got to the chambers where the god(s) dwelt. How, then, was religion practised by those who did not belong to the core temple personnel, and what was its spatial context? These are questions deserving of a considerably more detailed investigation than can be ventured here; I simply explore some pointers for further discussion.

Outside of the temple proper, the public face of state religion was represented by the ceremonial occasions when the divine statues were carried through the streets on their various journeys. It is clear that the city-dwellers could act as spectators when these public processions passed through the city. However, it is quite uncertain whether they might participate directly in the proceedings in any way, or how they might have responded to the spectacles before them. In the ritual texts, these occasions are described entirely from the point of view of the participants who were members of the temple personnel, not from that of the onlookers. It seems most unlikely that they watched in stony-faced silence, but unfortunately the written sources are simply not concerned with the audience.

In an inscription of his the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II claims: 'I did not allow troublemakers to prevent the people dwelling in (Babylon) from drawing the chariot pole (*sirdû*) of Marduk, my lord' (Levy 1947: 16, ii 15; cf. ibid. 8, ii 13; Reiner 1984: 312 s.v. *sirdû* A.a.). This celebration of peaceful urban living conditions alludes to the unhindered celebration of the New Year festival, but it also implies that the city-dwellers were directly involved in the proceedings. This is something of an exaggeration: participation in public ritual was not entirely reserved for the higher cultic personnel while their subordinates toiled behind the scenes, but nevertheless only members of the temple priesthood would have played a part, because only they fulfilled the requirement of cultic purity. There is evidence, for example, that the men who carried the sedan bearing the divine statue on processions (cf. the aforementioned passage) belonged to the middle-ranking

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temple personnel. A Hellenistic-era ritual text, describing what was probably the second New Year festival in Uruk, mentions (prebendary) brewers 'who are harnessed to the carrying pole (*tallu*)' (Linssen 2004: 209–211, l. 7). Somewhat earlier administrative documents from the Neo-Babylonian Ebabbar temple at Sippar mention personnel responsible for carrying the sedan of the goddess Annunitu (Pinches 1982: pl. 161, no. 456; pl. 55, no. 172), and Jursa (1995: 58) has identified some of the individuals named in these two tablets as prebendary orchard-keepers (*rab-banê*) and also a boatman (*malāhu*). Interestingly, some documents refer to a shortage of men available to carry the divine sedan:

> Men for the carrying poles are completely lacking! Let my lords send many men! (Clay 1919: no. 51, 5–8. Letter of Iddin-ahi to the Chief Administrator (*šatammu*) of the Eanna temple in Uruk and to Nabu-ahu-iddin, the Supervisor of Eanna; written *c.* 539–526 BC).

> There are no men here for the carrying poles! Let the lords send me as many men as (are needed for) the carrying poles! (Clay 1919: no. 82, 6–10. Letter of Šamaš-idri' to the Chief Administrator of Eanna and to Sin-šarru-uṣur, the Supervisor of Eanna; written *c.* 525–521 BC).

Both letters are dated according to the prosopography of the Supervisors of Eanna (*ša rēš šarri bēl piqitti ayakki*); see Kleber (2008: 36–37). As the senders invoke respectively the deities Šamaš and Aya, and Šamaš and Bunene, it is likely that they were writing on behalf of the Ebabbar temple of nearby Larsa, which was dependent upon Eanna.

Since men of prebendary rank are unlikely to have had any choice when it came to performing duties such as bearing the divine sedans, these passages surely reflect a general shortage of manpower rather than any wilful disinclination on their part. As cultic personnel, these men would have had to be consecrated (Waerzeggers and Jursa 2008), and it would have been their responsibility to ensure that the divine sedan and its occupant came to no harm. Note that an Assyrian letter reports of men carrying the goddess Šarratsamme from the temple when one of them slipped and a leg of the ceremonial couch touched the ground (Cole and Machinist 1998: no. 192). Although in the edition the letter is headed 'Damage to divine furnishings', it seems to me likely that the issue at stake was rather the defiling of the couch through its contact with the impure ground.

The individual in the role of private worshipper in the first millennium BC has been detected in interpretations of the term *kāribu*. Linssen (2004: 161), for example, explains the term as 'perhaps not a priest but a citizen, a praying, private person, who offers on special occasions'. Offerings of the *kāribu*, frequently consisting of sheep, are often paired with offerings of the king (e.g. *niqī šarri*/*niqī kāribi*). However, the administrative texts indicate that the actual offerings were made collectively (Da Riva 2002), even if they derived ultimately from individuals, and so the identity of the individual was submerged in the process.

It is clear from the topographical texts that a great many cultic installations (pedestals, altars) must have been located in the city streets, and in fact a couple of built features that

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have been excavated in the streets of Merkes, Babylon, very likely represent structures of this kind (Baker 2009). It has been noted that street shrines were often associated with goddesses (especially Ištar), and that they may have been frequented by women in particular (Oppenheim 1960: 5 s.v. *ibratu*). If this is correct then it sheds interesting light on the gender aspect of cultic practice. The free-standing temples of this period—that is, those which were not enclosed by a precinct—often had an altar situated directly outside the main entrance. Examples include the temples of Ninmah and Ninurta at Babylon (Koldewey 1911: pls. III, VII). Presumably this altar served as a transitional station, marking the setting out of the deity and also the home-coming on ceremonial occasions; it also afforded the onlookers their first, and last, sighting of the deity. Given that these temples were integrated into the urban fabric, being surrounded by residential areas, festive occasions such as these may have served to unite the local community. The Nappahu family of 6th–early 5th-century BC Babylon, who were prebendaries of the goddess Išhara, appear to have been based in the Šuanna district where the temple of that deity was situated (Baker 2004: 56), and Charpin (1986: 144–147) has noted that at Old Babylonian Ur local inhabitants tended to be attached to a deity whose shrine lay in their neighbourhood. Thus, for those who did not actually live within the precinct of a major temple which they served, it is plausible to suppose a degree of allegiance to the local shrine, and that this afforded a degree of community identity and cohesion (note also that city districts named after a local temple are common at this time).

We are used to thinking of the Mesopotamian temples as monumental structures whose construction was initiated and celebrated by the king. However, for the Achaemenid period we have a dearth of royal inscriptions commemorating such events. Since many of the temples actually survived down to the Seleucid era and even later, it is most unlikely that no major works were carried out during the period, nor that such works were not subject to approval at a high level. The scarcity of building inscriptions probably rather represents a shift in the prevailing ruler ideology: after Cyrus, the Achaemenid kings apparently saw no need to commemorate major building works in the traditional manner. The practice was eventually revived, since a cylinder of Antiochos I from Ezida, the god Nabu's temple at Borsippa (268 BC) has been handed down to us (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1991). In further pursuit of this theme, it is interesting to note the construction at Nippur of a small, atypical shrine which has been dated to the Achaemenid period (Gibson 1975: 13 and figs. 20–21). In fact, an Egyptian *cippus* (stone stele) found inside the shrine is dated more precisely to the Late Achaemenid or early Ptolemaic era (J.H. Johnson *apud* Gibson 1975: 146). This 'chapel', situated in sounding WA close to the goddess Gula's temple, was a simple, originally three-room affair, with a stepped doorway leading into the largest, central room (the cella), which had an altar against its rear wall. There was also an altar outside of the entrance. Given its small size and atypical configuration, this short-lived shrine may represent a rare (if not unique) surviving instance of a shrine that was an entirely local innovation, built at the instigation of the community rather than a ruler. In fact the inhabitants of Nippur may have enjoyed a rather long-standing autonomy in this respect: no Neo-Babylonian building inscription is recorded as coming from the site (Da Riva 2008: 60 n. 201), and since it

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has been quite extensively explored, this may not be merely a question of chance. I suspect, rather, that the temples of Nippur were neglected deliberately as a matter of policy, and that the assimilation of the gods of Nippur into the cults of Babylon, as demonstrated by George (1997), is relevant to this scenario.

Aside from the formal structures represented by the temples and street altars/pedestals/shrines, cultic or magical spaces could be created as the need arose. Ritual sites could be delineated, purified, and protected from evil by various means—for example, by employing a magic flour circle (*zisurrû*), or *urigallu*-standards (Caplice 1967: 30). Portable altars of reed (*paṭīru*) or offering tables (*pašūru*) could be set up before a certain deity or deities, with offerings being placed upon them. In a legal document a slave who is well known as an agent for the Egibi/Nur-Sin family is obliged on a specific day to swear an oath at sunrise, within a magic circle (*gišhurru*) (Wunsch 2000a: I 131, II 199, no. 166: 1–3; Babylon, 540 BC). It is clear that this clause has to be taken at face value, because the tablet further stipulates that if the weather conditions are unfavourable on the said day, the man is to swear the oath one month later. It is extremely rare for the everyday documents to afford us such a snapshot of magic in action.

What about the private, household dimension of religious practice? The subject of family religion in Babylonia has been studied by van der Toorn (1996b: 1–147; 1996a), drawing predominantly on evidence from the second millennium BC. However, the question of continuity and change into the first millennium has not been addressed in detail. A tablet of Itti-Marduk-balaṭu of the Egibi family of Babylon identifies him as a 'worshipper of Marduk' (*pālih Marduk*), which is especially interesting considering no clear temple connection has yet been identified for this entrepreneurial family (Wunsch 2000b: 102 n. 19). This appellation does seem, then, to reflect an aspect of his private persona, given in his own words (as author of the tablet in question). However, such clues as to private beliefs and observation are extremely rare among the archival documents.

Significant differences in the accommodation of religious practices within the household can be observed, and these have yet to receive the attention they deserve. It is striking that 'chapels' and rooms with altars of the kind identified in excavated Old Babylonian houses from Ur and elsewhere (Miglus 1999: 72–73; pls. 6–13, 28, rooms with cultic installations marked 'k') are simply not found in houses of the first millennium. Such rooms have been associated with the cult of the personal god of the family or the head of the household (Postgate 1992: 99–101), and perhaps also with the cult of the ancestors (at Ur, graves were typically associated with the 'chapel'). The absence of these features in private houses of the first millennium remains to be explained, but it does suggest a significant change in the practice of family religion. No cultic features are mentioned by Miglus (1999: 87–98) in his treatment of Babylonian housing of the later second millennium, though the evidence from this period is rather too scanty for us to determine with confidence whether this change had already taken place by then. It is worth noting also that the Akkadian word *kispu* 'funerary offering' (for deceased kin) is attested in everyday letters and documents down to the Middle Babylonian era but not in those of the first millennium (Oppenheim 1971: 426–427); perhaps this is another sign of a change in family religion.

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Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to develop some ideas for interpreting the built environment of the Babylonian cities in a way which departs from the more traditional preoccupation with the monumental structures. My approach relies on integrating the archaeological and textual sources in the conviction that the resulting whole is greater than the sum of the parts (though of course many gaps and uncertainties still remain). The cuneiform written record is not always well suited to shedding light on the popular experience of urban living, not least because it is difficult to determine how widely the values reflected in the texts were shared by the inhabitants, especially those at the lower end of the social scale who were furthest removed from the elite scribal culture. It is also uncertain to what extent ritual and magical practices, for example, were carried out by the ordinary inhabitants, since much of the relevant documentation is of a prescriptive, 'handbook' character. Though there is no reason per se to doubt that they were, direct evidence is rare because the everyday documents are scarcely ever concerned with such activities. We can be sure about one thing: the urban experience varied from person to person and was affected by many factors, among them wealth, status, gender, age, occupation, health, degree of literacy, and so on. Thus it would be a mistake to attempt to reconstruct a monolithic urban experience. In many respects the built environment itself is the best testimony to shared cultural values and a common social structure:

> The meanings that are given to places and the spatial order are not fixed or invariant givens but must be invoked in the context of practice and recurrent usage. Meanings adhere to a spatial frame only through the medium of human activity.... The relationship between spatial form and human agency is mediated by meaning. People actively give their physical environments meanings, and then act upon those meanings. (Parker Pearson and Richards 1994: 5)

With these considerations in mind I have tried to show that a closer and more subtle reading of the built environment in all of its manifestations, written and material, can lead to an improved appreciation of the complexities of Babylonian city dwelling.

Further reading

For a general introduction to the Mesopotamian cities see the works of Stone (1995; 2007) and van de Mieroop (1997). The cities of first-millennium BC Babylonia are studied in detail by Baker (forthcoming), with particular emphasis on housing and the residential areas. Issues of city layout and spatial organization are discussed by Baker (2007) and Stone (1991). The article 'Reading Babylon' (Mieroop 2003) takes a novel approach, focusing on the visual impact of the urban built environment.

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PART VI

MAKING KNOWLEDGE

Creativity and innovation are concepts that feature prominently in works on ancient Near Eastern technology and artistic production (e.g. Bourriau and Phillips 2004; Cancik-Kirschbaum 2007; Gunter 1990; Shortland 2001; Wilde 2003). Mesopotamia is widely recognized as an innovator or early adapter of the seeder-plough, the pottery wheel, bronze metallurgy, the production of glass, and chariot warfare, to mention but some of the most famous examples. However, with the invention of cuneiform script as the obvious exception (see Englund in Chapter 2), the role of creativity and innovation is far less frequently made explicit in studies concerned with literate culture where, quite on the contrary, the longevity and orthodoxy of the cuneiform tradition are often emphasized.

But, as F.R. Kraus stressed in his appreciation of the intellectual achievements of the Old Babylonian period, cuneiform culture was highly innovative. For him:

> Old Babylonian man…when maintaining what he had inherited and seeking out his own new path…gave the world three very different gifts, and each of the highest value: the rational fair handling of civil legal disputes; the methods of scientific observation and systematic classification; and grammar and bilingual dictionaries. (Kraus 1973: 144–145; translated from German)[1]

The first of these innovations—legal procedure—is Sophie Démare-Lafont's subject in Chapter 16, while Niek Veldhuis, in his analysis of the different levels of cuneiform literacy in Chapter 4, discusses the third topic.

[1] '…der Mensch der altbabylonischen Zeit…, als er instandhielt, was er ererbt hatte, und eigene neue Wege einschlug…hat der Welt drei Güter verschiedenster Art, aber jedes von höchstem Werte, gegeben: die vernünftige, gerechte Behandlung von bürgerlichen Streitfällen; die Methoden wissenschaftlicher Beobachtung und systematischer Klassifizierung; Grammatik und zweisprachiges Wörterbuch.'

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Scientific observation in cuneiform scholarship, the second of the innovations singled out by Kraus, is discussed by Francesca Rochberg in Chapter 29. Highlighting the changing aims, interests, and methods of observing natural phenomena, she compares and contrasts two first-millennium BC corpora of observational texts focused on the phenomena of the moon and the planets: the Neo-Assyrian scholars' reports and the Neo-Babylonian Astronomical Diaries. Stressing the impact on these observations of the changing goals and standards of the social contexts that produced them, Rochberg demonstrates the infusion of judgement on perception and the consequent interdependence of observation and theory.

The first two chapters of this section identify innovation and creativity as key factors in two social and intellectual environments that usually are described as bastions of traditionalism: scholarly libraries and the schooling system. In Chapter 26, Eleanor Robson's analysis of the creation of new cuneiform genres and compositions and their dissemination focuses on the evidence from six Assyrian and Babylonian libraries and collections of scholarly tablets from between the 7th and 2nd centuries BC, while in Chapter 27 Steve Tinney portrays the new cuneiform text corpus as it emerged at the end of the Old Babylonian period in the aftermath of the demise of Sumerian as a spoken language and the ensuing stagnancy of Sumerophone intellectual culture.

The creative qualities immanent in the cuneiform script are perhaps most apparent when considering how this writing system, originally conceived to fit the requirements of the Sumerian language, was adjusted for the needs of Akkadian, and subsequently also for a range of other languages. Chapter 28 provides a case study on how cuneiform was adapted to suit new cultural and social environments (cf. Rogers 2003): Mark Weeden discusses its transformation in Hittite Anatolia in the middle of the second millennium BC and analyses the impact of cuneiform in this political, social, and intellectual context.

Chapter 30, finally, is dedicated to the Hellenistic historian Berossos, the author of a history of Babylonia who was active during the reign of the Seleucid king Antiochos I (r. 281–261 BC). If creativity is defined as the ability to form new links between existing ideas, then Berossos is a good example of a creative mind at work. Geert De Breucker locates him between (Mesopotamian and Greek) tradition and innovation, and emphasizes that by building a bridge between cuneiform and Greek culture the Babylonian historian created one of the most important sources for Mesopotamian culture and history. Indeed for almost two millennia between the disappearance of cuneiform culture and its rediscovery in the 19th century Berossos' history of Babylonia constituted the only native witness.

Further reading

Landsberger's 'Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt' (1926 *The Conceptual*; translated as *Autonomy of the Babylonian World*, 1977) remains a milestone in the appreciation of the originality of cuneiform culture but, as Sallaberger (2007) has pointed out, it is best understood within the intellectual context in which it was conceived. A recent discussion of cuneiform lexicography with a special focus on the creative aspects of lexical lists is Edzard (2007), with Taylor (2007) providing a useful overview of the genre and its development over two

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millennia. Pearce (1998) is a short study of innovation in commentaries on omen texts, linking them with the conventions of lexical lists. George (2007: 451–453) and Finkel (1988) study Sin-leqe-unninni and Esangila-kin-apli, two men whom later cuneiform tradition credited with significant textual creativity, while Heeßel (2009) draws well-deserved attention to Raba-ša-Marduk, a Babylonian physician active at the Hittite royal court, whose writings were also valued at the Assyrian court.

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CHAPTER 26

THE PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION OF SCHOLARLY KNOWLEDGE

ELEANOR ROBSON

Because Mesopotamian intellectual culture is so often characterized as conservative, traditional, and even 'canonical', because it is so difficult to identify 'authors' in the cuneiform record, and because of the extreme patchiness of our evidence, the prospect of identifying innovation and creativity in cuneiform culture is a daunting one. However, the 'stream of tradition' (Oppenheim 1960: 410) was not generated spontaneously and nor did it ever run smoothly. While this deservedly famous phrase rightly captures the fragility and longevity of Mesopotamian intellectual culture, it also has its problems. The word 'tradition' encapsulates the mid-century Assyriological consensus about the conservative nature of cuneiform culture, while 'stream' invokes a natural, self-perpetuating process that does not depend on individual creativity or local singularity. The worry is that the unreflecting repetition of Oppenheim's famous words sometimes does more harm than good, as it inhibits discussion of innovation, creativity, individualism, and localism in cuneiform culture.

At the coarsest level of chronological, geographical, and textual granularity, we see significant change, even after the long-recognized breakdown of Sumerophone intellectual culture at the end of the Old Babylonian period (e.g. Tinney in this volume). Genres came and went: Babylonian observational astronomy first appears in the mid-8th century in the form of eclipse records (Hunger, Sachs, and Steele 2001) and survived until the 1st century AD, but was never adopted in the Assyrian court. Horoscopic astrology was developed in the late 5th century (Rochberg 2004: 98–120), with other disciplines such as medicine and extispicy adapting to it shortly thereafter (e.g. Scurlock 2005–06; Heeßel 2008). Mathematical astronomy took off in the 4th century (Britton 1993), with significant differences in methodology between Uruk and Babylon. We see changing trends even amongst the very last generations of cuneiform scholars in 2nd-century Uruk: a steady shift away from the astrological series *Enūma Anu Enlil*

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towards ever more sophisticated mathematical methods of astronomical prediction, even while the lamentations and rituals of *kalûtu* continued to be reproduced as before (Robson 2007b).

It is much harder to identify compositions or genres falling out of use, most obviously because arguments from silence are always dangerous. But there is a further problem, in that 'use' has many meanings. Compositions may retain value as educational tools or have antiquarian worth even when not used for professional praxis. For instance, already in the Neo-Assyrian court, *āšipus* never seem to have cited the diagnostic omen series *Sakikkû* or to have written commentaries on it, although many manuscripts of this work were kept in the royal library there (Frahm 2004: 50; Robson 2008b). It is perhaps easier—though answering a rather different question—to see when the various scholarly titles stopped being used. For instance, both *asûs* 'physicians' and *bārûs* 'extispicers'—diviners from the entrails of sacrificial animals—are ubiquitous in the 7th-century correspondence of the Neo-Assyrian court. But *asûs* are apparently never mentioned in the written records of later Babylonia, while *bārûs* seem to disappear from the temple archives of Sippar, Uruk, and Babylon by the early Achaemenid period. (The youngest dated reference to a *bārû* in a non-scholarly document known to me is Strassmaier (1889: no. 234) from 574 BC, but there are undated references from the archive of the Eanna temple in Uruk that may be a little later.) However, the *kalû* 'lamenter' and *āšipu* (later also *mašmaššu*) 'exorcist' are recorded to the very end of cuneiform documentation in late 2nd-century Uruk, where the profession *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil* 'scribe of (the celestial omen series) "When Anu, Enlil"' is no longer a separate profession but a title taken by *kalûs* or *āšipus* on completing apprenticeships with those already expert in astronomy (Robson 2008a: 258–260). At Marduk's temple Esangila in Babylon, *kalûs* and *āšipus* were allocated food and clothing until at least the late 4th century BC (Beaulieu 2006: 13–14), while the *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil* were still active there a full 200 years later (Rochberg 2004: 234–235).

So where did new compositions and genres come from? How and why did they replicate—or fail to? And how and why did they eventually fall out of favour? Within the limits of this chapter I cannot hope to provide definitive answers but I shall aim to provide some tools for thinking further about these fascinating and important questions. We will look first at potential bodies of evidence for the production and dissemination of new knowledge and then at how creativity and mobility play out in the historical record.

Bodies of evidence

When Oppenheim coined the expression the 'stream of tradition' in 1960, it was perhaps not surprising that he saw it as homogenous, so that 'the picture offered by the library of Assurbanipal in Nineveh is essentially representative' (Oppenheim 1960: 412; 1977:

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15–16). For at that time Assurbanipal's library was the only large, securely dated and provenanced corpus of first-millennium cuneiform scholarship that was accessible to research. Much of the remaining available material was from the antiquities market or very informal excavations—such as those conducted in northern Babylonia for the British Museum in the 1870s onwards—which could thus be dated and provenanced only very approximately. Yet he predicted that:

> when Assyriologists will be able to follow the fate of individual text groups through the history of their tradition, they will obtain more insights into the workings of this 'stream' and, conceivably, light will be shed some day on ideological preferences and other attitudes that neither the content nor the wording of these texts is likely to reflect directly. (Oppenheim 1960: 412; cf. 1977: 16)

Indeed, over the past century, and especially between the Second World War and the First Gulf War, controlled and recorded excavations of first-millennium sites have uncovered several substantial finds of scholarly tablets *in situ*, which offer the potential for careful geographical and chronological analysis. In the first decades of the 20th century, several such groups of tablets were discovered in the cities of Assur and Babylon but the long, sad history of their post-excavation misfortunes means that, with a few notable exceptions, many are now almost impossible to reconstruct in any useful detail (Pedersén 1985–86; 2005; Maul 2003; 2010; Clancier 2009: 105–213; Robson forthcoming b). Similarly, the discovery in 1924 of a small group of early Neo-Babylonian scholarly tablets in Kiš was badly managed and then largely forgotten (Moorey 1978: 48–50; Robson 2004: 46–62). More promising, as we shall see, are the find groups from British expeditions to 7th-century Huzirina and Kalhu, Iraqi excavations in 6th- to 5th-century Sippar and Babylon, and German digs at 5th to 2nd-century Uruk.

These corpora are valuable not solely because we can be confident of their dating and archaeological provenance but also because of their colophons. Colophons—a feature of many scholarly tablets, particularly from the first millennium—were written at the end of the main text as a sort of book-plate or catalogue record (Hunger 1968). They typically contain information about the text itself, the tablet on which it was written, and those who wrote it and for whom—all crucial data for historians of the 'tradition'.

Huzirina (modern Sultantepe) was a tiny town in western Assyria, about 15 km north of the provincial capital Harran, both of which were destroyed by the Medes and their allies in the final rout of the empire in 610 BC. Parts of the mound were excavated briefly by a joint British–Turkish archaeological team in the early 1950s, revealing a cache of about 400 scholarly tablets piled up outside the door of a substantial private house, protected by a semi-circular arrangement of wine-jars (Lloyd and Gökçe 1953; Gurney and Finkelstein 1957; Gurney and Hulin 1964). Were they deposited there for safe-keeping from the invaders or dumped as worthless fill for a piece of outdoor furniture? That is not clear, but it is safe to assume that they originated in the house itself, as unused tablet clay was also found in the central courtyard (on tablet manufacture see Taylor in this volume). The principal, but by no means only, names on the tablets' colophons were

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those of one Qurdi-Nergal, a *šangû*-priest of the god Zababa and his consort, and other members of the Nur-Šamaš family.

Kalhu, an Assyrian royal city on the Tigris between Assur and Nineveh, served as the capital until the 8th century and continued to be occupied until its destruction in 614 BC and beyond. In 1955–57 British excavators unearthed around 250 scholarly tablets from a room in Ezida, the temple of Nabu, god of wisdom, on the royal citadel (Wiseman and Black 1996; Black 2009). More such tablets were discovered by an Iraqi team in the mid-1980s. Their findspot, a room whose doorway directly faced Nabu's shrine, was almost certainly the temple's library. Some of its original contents had been moved elsewhere in antiquity, perhaps to Sargon II's capital Dur-Šarrukin and certainly to Nineveh, where many tablets with Kalhu colophons were discovered in 19th-century excavations (Robson, forthcoming b). Perhaps not surprisingly, the few extant colophons feature the names of royal scholars, such as Adad-šumu-uṣur and Nabu-zeru-lešir, Esarhaddon's chief *āšipu* and chief scribe respectively in the early 7th century BC. Both men were sons of Sargon II's great advisor Nabu-zuqup-kenu, who had been based at Kalhu himself.

A generation later than these two Neo-Assyrian finds is a group of about 260 school tablets discovered in Babylon by an Iraqi team in the late 1970s. They had been used as bricks in the foundations of the shrines of two small temples near the northeast corner of the precinct of Etemenanki, Marduk's ziggurat, some time during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 604–562 BC). The larger was dedicated to the god Nabu-ša-hare ('Nabu of accounts') and the smaller to the minor goddess Ašratu. Almost all of them originally bore colophons naming their student authors and dedicating them to Nabu, indicating their primary function as votive offerings (Cavigneaux 1981; George 1986: 12–16).

Northwest of Babylon, in the city of Sippar, the main temple was Ebabbar, dedicated to the sun-god Šamaš. In the mid-1980s Iraqi excavators found about 800 scholarly tablets, still in their pigeonholes in a small storage room in the northwest wing, which was probably named E-ulmaš and dedicated to the goddess Annunitu, Šamaš's divine consort. Although only about thirty tablets have been published so far, dates on their colophons range from the mid- to late 6th century BC and feature *kalûs, āšipus*, and a trainee *bārû* from several different families (provisionally, see Anonymous 1987: 248–249 and pl. XLVII; Fahdil and Hilgert 2008: 183 with full bibliography).

Further south and about a century younger, another important set of finds for the history of cuneiform scholarship comes from a house in the city of Uruk, rebuilt several times from the late 5th to early 4th centuries BC and perhaps later. It was excavated in the late 1960s to early 1970s by German archaeologists, who found about 420 scholarly tablets in it, some stored in large jars but most scattered by later burials dug down between the walls, as well as about fifty household legal documents. It turned out that the tablets had belonged to two different families of *āšipus*: the Šangu-Ninurta family, who had occupied the house until about 420 BC, and the Ekur-zakir family, who had lived there about a century later (Hunger 1976; Weiher 1982 1988 1993 1998; Clancier 2009: 47–72, 387–405).

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Our final group of scholarly tablets is from the enormous temple to the sky-god Anu/Zeus in Uruk, which was dug in the late 1950s and early 1960s by the same German team who were later to find the *āšipus*' house. They unearthed some 110 scholarly tablets, plus about thirty administrative records, from a small room near the southeast gateway to the temple where illicit diggings had been made in earlier decades. The formally excavated tablets, which date to the first half of the 2nd century BC, are clearly the remains of a much larger group, including many tablets sold on the antiquities market in the early 20th century and thereby dispersed throughout museum collections worldwide. The core can be identified through colophons of the Ekur-zakir and Sin-leqe-unninni families of *āšipus* and *kalûs*, but it is impossible to reconstruct exactly which of the illicitly excavated tablets were originally stored with the formally excavated ones (Dijk and Mayer 1980; Clancier 2009: 73–80, 406–409).

This, then, is our raw material: six substantial groups of scholarly tablets from reasonably well-defined findspots spanning the 7th to the 2nd centuries BC. Two, from Huzirina and Uruk, were found in or near domestic dwellings, the rest in temples. Two, Huzirina again and Babylon, had clearly been dumped outside their original use context, while only one, from Sippar, was still configured as its users had intended. Several are conventionally labelled as 'libraries' (e.g. Pedersén 1998), but we should think carefully before using this term to mean anything more than an excavated assemblage of non-archival tablets. As we shall see, the colophons and other evidence show that these collections were not all used by the same types of people for the same types of functions—and that only Kalhu (partially) conforms to Oppenheim's classic model of Assurbanipal's library at Nineveh.

This should not surprise us. Most obviously, the royal tablet collections of Nineveh were enormous compared to the six assemblages just described. As Jeanette Fincke (2004) reminds us, as well as the main 'library' in Sennacherib's Southwest Palace, there were substantial holdings in Assurbanipal's North Palace and the temples of Nabu and Ištar on the royal citadel, amounting to some 26,000 tablets (plus some 4,500 administrative and legal records). But the means by which the collections accrued were also unusual, if not unique. Naturally, many tablets were written *in situ*, as copies, commentaries, or new compositions. But successive Assyrian kings, even before Assurbanipal, scoured Babylonia for tablets and writing-boards, to be taken or copied forcibly (see Frahm in this volume). In 647 BC alone, at least 2000 tablets and 300 writing-boards made their way from private collections into the palaces of Nineveh according to inventories found there (Parpola 1983). Fincke (2004: 55) estimates that nearly 3700 scholarly tablets from Nineveh are in Babylonian script—around 1 in 7 of the total (excluding administative and legal tablets). Many more were copied into Assyrian script and given royal colophons (Frahm 2004: 47). Clearly neither temple communities nor scholarly families had the means (or the ambition?) to accrue writings en masse like the Assyrian kings did. With the partial exception of Kalhu—which too was an Assyrian royal collection staffed by court scholars—we cannot therefore assume that other 'libraries' are simply miniature copies of Nineveh's.

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Dissemination through education

The obvious starting point for understanding the dissemination of cuneiform literacy in the first millennium BC is the scribal school. Indeed, Oppenheim (1960: 411; cf. 1977: 13–14) saw scribal training as a 'purely operational though highly effective device' which consisted in 'copy[ing] faithfully the texts that made up the stream of tradition' and thereby kept it flowing relatively unchanged. He contrasts this apparently straightforward imperative with other possible motives, such as 'the desire to preserve a body of religious writings', and 'the wish to sustain one tradition against the opposition of, or in competition with, rival traditions', neither of which he detects in cuneiform culture. In this view the 'stream' is entirely without human agency: scholarly works are copied simply as a means of inducting new members into the profession, with little sense of the motivations behind the 'duty' or 'faith' ascribed to them.

In Oppenheim's day very little was known about the means by which the young became cuneiform literate. As the contributions to this volume amply show, a huge amount of research over the past fifteen years has dramatically improved our understanding of this process, especially for the Old Babylonian period (e.g. Tinney, Veldhuis, and Weeden in this volume). It is now clear that scribal training was not simply an 'operational' matter, a purely functional exercise in teaching the mechanics of cuneiform script. In 18th-century Nippur, for instance, the intensive study of Sumerian literature was very carefully geared to situating scribal students within a clearly defined and constructed professional community. The careful choice of hymns to long-dead kings, narrative myths and legends about traditional figures, and paradigmatic texts about the attributes of an ideal society all contributed to the 'creation of a Sumerian heritage' (Veldhuis 2004: 66–80). Furthermore, with its heavy emphasis on literacy, numeracy, and law this was a heritage that positioned the scribe at its centre, as the upholder of social justice on behalf of royalty and deity by means of fair measurement and accurate calculation (Robson 2007a; 2008a: 97–124).

A comparison with contemporary training in non-professional cuneiform literacy reveals the heavy ideological freight of Nippurian scribal education. In 19th-century Assur, several hundred miles to the north of Nippur, junior members of merchant families learned enough cuneiform to communicate long-distance with their relatives and trading partners. The small numbers of extant exercises from Assur and its Anatolian trading colony Kaneš suggest that these skills were mostly learned on the job. But those practice tablets that do survive are all closely related to the merchants' immediate needs of writing about, and calculating with, the raw materials and manufactured goods in which they traded (Michel 2003: 139–140; Robson 2008a: 134–136). One can easily detect conventional components to the format of tablets and the content of exercises, but little sense of a self-conscious construction of a scribal or mercantile identity and heritage.

Nor was scribal education unchanging. The elementary curriculum of 18th-century Nippur was significantly different from that of the late second millennium (Veldhuis

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2000), which in turn differed from scribal education in mid-first-millennium northern Babylonia. They share a commonality in the use of lexical lists, and memorization through repeated copying, to teach cuneiform script. But the texts themselves, the way they are excerpted, the formats of the tablets, and even the target language of instruction underwent significant change.

As Petra Gesche (2000) showed in her monumental study of Neo-Babylonian scribal exercise tablets from cities in northern Babylonia, plus Uruk and Ur in the south, in the mid-first millennium elementary training in cuneiform typically took place in two phases. In the first phase students concentrated on learning how to write the basic wedges that comprise cuneiform script, plus seven long core texts in their entirety (Gesche 2000: 44–48):

- the signs DIŠ+BAD (i.e. a vertical, horizontal, and diagonal wedge) repeated;
- the sign A repeated;
- the list of Akkadian syllables now called Syllabary A (S^a);
- a similar text known as Syllabary B (S^b);
- a list of deities, now known as the Weidner God List;
- Tablets I–III of the bilingual thematic noun list called UR_5.RA = *hubullu* 'interest-bearing loan', after its first line.

Short or long extracts from these exercises were written out on large, square, multi-column tablets, often combined with brief passages from ad hoc and 'non-canonical' lists—for instance metrology, personal names, place names, professional designations, lexical lists—and/or literary works, proverbs, and administrative formulae, optionally with a colophon in the final column.

In the second phase long, single-column tablets were preferred, with dates of writing replacing colophons. Students continued to copy Syllabaries A and B, plus short excerpts from incantations, hymns, literary works, and more complex lexical lists, with up to four different compositions on a single tablet (Gesche 2000: 48–52).

Unfortunately, at this stage of research relatively little is known about the internal chronology or geography of first-millennium elementary education. But it is possible to identify consistent patterns of textual choice in the provenanced tablets groups mentioned above. For instance, we can compare the relative frequency of the core exercises written on the 260-odd Phase 1 tablets deposited in Nabu-ša-hare's temple in Babylon with those in the entirety of Gesche's corpus (Table 26.1; data from Gesche 2000: 806–820).

Overall, the Nabu-ša-hare tablets account for just under 1 in 5 (18%) of the examples of Phase 1 core exercises in Gesche's Neo-Babylonian corpus. Yet they show a relatively strong preference for the very basic sign-writing exercises and the Weidner God List (22–24%) and a distinct non-preference for the word list UR_5.RA = *hubullu* (6–14%). And fully half of the Nabu-ša-hare tablets have surviving colophons, reflecting their function as votive offerings, compared to about 5% of the Phase 1 tablets from elsewhere. A particularly extensive example—from a compilation of Syllabary B, spellings, personal names, and a list of capacity measures—runs:

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Table 26.1 Core Phase 1 scribal exercises from the temple of Nabu-ša-hare in Babylon as a proportion of published examples

Exercise	*Number in temple*	*Total number published*	*Temple tablets as percentage of total published*
The signs DIŠ+BAD, repeated	22	96	23%
The sign A, repeated	18	82	22%
Syllabary A	101	530	19%
Syllabary B	66	357	18%
Weidner God List	27	111	24%
UR_5.RA I	20	163	12%
UR_5.RA II	4	60	6%
UR_5.RA III	7	49	14%
Total core Phase I exercises	*259*	*1448*	*18%*

> [To Nabu, his lord: for the life] of his breath, [the length of] his days, the health of his seed, [the well-being] of his heart, [the well-being] of his flesh, the non-existence of his illness, Nabu-eṣir-napišti, son of Sin-ahu, wrote the tablet and deposited it in E-gišla-anki ('House of the auditor of heaven and earth'), the temple of his lordship, in the *gunnu* receptacle. [He placed (?)] the tablet [in front of] Nabu [...]. (Cavigneaux 1981: 79.B.1.59+; Robson 2008a: 197)

Further differentiation of the corpus as a whole will undoubtedly reveal more clearly the textual choices individual teachers made, and perhaps even the reasons behind them. For instance, a fascinating but little-studied Neo-Babylonian lexical exercise called UM.ME.A = *ummânu* is attested on nearly forty Phase 1 tablets, including nine from Nabu-ša-hare's temple. It is so named because its first line gives the logogram and Akkadian syllabic spelling for *ummânu* 'expert'. The second line does the same for *šamallû* 'apprentice', then its remaining forty-odd lines list a variety of logograms for *amēlu* 'man', *šarru* 'king', various royal and courtly titles. It finishes with an impressive fourteen different writings for *āšipu*, 'exorcist' but no other scholarly profession (Gesche 2000: 127–132). The exercise clearly situates the trainee scribe—the trainee *āšipu*?—in a world of courtly expertise but, intriguingly, one that lacks the *asû, bārû, kalû*, and *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Ellil*. (However, Gesche 2000: 128 n. 473 notes the existence of a single tablet from northern Babylonia listing many different logograms for the word *bārû* 'diviner'.) The list was copied in Sippar, Babylon, Kiš, and Ur but is not attested amongst the elementary exercises from the *āšipus*' house in Uruk, where one might have expected it.

Many of the so-called libraries are deeply implicated in scribal training too, albeit at a higher level than the elementary exercises from Nabu-ša-hare's temple. For instance, there is just one Phase 2 school exercise amongst the scholarly tablets from Huzirina (Gurney and Hulin 1964: no. 176), but the colophons of another twenty-eight tablets refer to their authors as *šamallû* 'apprentices'. Some of these men are members of the Nur-Šamaš family, the presumed owners of the house and tablets: the patriarch

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Qurdi-Nergal was himself a *šamallû agašgû* 'novice apprentice' in 701 BC, then his sons Mušallim-Bau and Nabu-zer-kitti-lešir took similar designations. Finally his (great?-) grandson Ninurta-[...] was a *šamallû ṣehru* 'junior apprentice' in 619 BC (Gurney 1997). But the remaining twenty *šamallû* seem to be unrelated to this family (Hunger 1968: nos. 351–402 *passim*). They include one Nabu-šum-iškun, son of the *turtānu's* (commander-in-chief's) senior scribe; Bel-le'i-..., son of the *turtānu's* scribe; Šum-tabni-uṣur, son of a royal doctor; Nabu-ibni, son of an Assyrian scribe; and Mutaqqin-Aššur, son of a scribe of the city (namely Assur). In other words, they are all the offspring of well-connected, well-educated men of empire, perhaps sent to Huzirina in order to further their education. However, given the low quality of many of the Huzirina scholarly manuscripts, and its location far from the imperial centre, several miles from the provincial capital, we should not imagine this was a particularly prestigious institution. Rather, we might perhaps see it as a minor private school, taking the middle-achieving sons of provincial officials who could not afford the scribal training on offer in the royal cities of Assur, Kalhu, and Nineveh (Robson, forthcoming a).

This admittedly fanciful scenario may be stretching the evidence somewhat, but similar patterns of non-familial apprenticeship can be identified in 7th-century Assur, amongst the scholarly tablets of the *āšipu* Kiṣir-Aššur (Maul 2010)—who perhaps ran precisely the sort of school that the Huzurina apprentices could not afford—and much later in Hellenistic Uruk. Here the social network was much tighter, however: over six generations we see the members of just four scholarly families, all closely associated with Anu's temple Reš, collaborating in the training of their sons (Robson 2007a). For instance, the *kalû* Anu-belšunu of the Sin-leqe-unninni family wrote apprenticeship tablets for both his father Nidintu-Anu and one Anu-belšunu of the Ah'utu family. He in turn trained his three sons in *kalûtu*, one of whom—Anu-aba-uter—also learned mathematical astronomy from Šamaš-eṭir of the Ekur-zakir family (who as a younger man had written scholarly tablets for Anu-uballiṭ of the Hunzu family). Šamaš-eṭir was an *āšipu* and the chief priest of Reš, who also held the title *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil*. After his apprenticeship with Šamaš-eṭir had concluded, Anu-aba-uter also called himself *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil* and went on to teach at least one member of his own family as well as an Ekur-zakir boy. Complex as it is, this is just one part of the scholarly training network that can be traced in 2nd-century Uruk (Robson 2008a: 240–260).

Textual production: A case study

To better understand how texts and tablets were produced by cuneiform scholars, we can take a closer look at one particular assemblage. As mentioned above, the *āšipus'* house of late Achaemenid–early Seleucid Uruk yielded a total of 420 extant scholarly tablets (that is, excluding the forty-odd legal and administrative documents found in the house). 112 of them, nearly 27%, have surviving colophons. (Of the remainder, only nineteen, or about 5% of the total, definitely had no colophon at all.) These colophons contain crucial information about the circumstances of textual production.

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Fifty of the 112 tablets with colophons—45%—explicitly state that they are copies of an earlier manuscript, a further forty-eight (43%) definitely do not state that they are copies (even though many are), while fifteen (13%) are too fragmentary to tell whether they originally contained a copying-statement or not. Allowing for the problems of small-sample statistics, it seems reasonable to estimate that about half the colophons originally mentioned copying and half did not. What differences can be discerned between those tablets that are explicitly said to be copies from other sources, and those that are not?

Let us turn first to the 'copied' tablets. In fact, the scribes had several different ways for expressing this activity, using one or more of the following set phrases, and minor variants on them:

- 'according to an old original/tablet/writing-board/copy from (somewhere)';
- 'copy of a wooden writing-board/old tablet';
- 'excerpted from a wooden writing-board';
- 'written and checked (and made good) against its original/from an old wooden writing-board';
- '(the scribe) wrote and checked (it) against its original'.

Examples include:

> Copy of a writing-board, property of the Eanna temple, written and checked. Tablet of Šamaš-iddin, junior *āšipu*, descendant of Šangu-Ninurta. (The incantation series *Bīt Rimki* 'Bath House' tablet III, Weiher 1988: no. 66)
>
> Excerpted from a wooden writing-board. Oblong tablet of Anu-ikṣur, [...], *āšipu*. (List of medico-magical ingredients, Hunger 1976: no. 56)
>
> According to an old tablet, Urukean copy. Rimut-Anu, son of Šamaš-iddin, descendant of Šangu-Ninurta, wrote and checked it. (Metrological tables, Weiher 1993: no. 172)
>
> Written, checked and made good according to its original. [Tablet of] Rimut-Anu [son of] Šamaš-iddin, descendant of Šangu-Ninurta, Urukean. (The Exorcist's Manual [see Schwemer in this volume], Weiher 1998: no. 231)

The originals include 'an old writing-board from Nippur' (Weiher 1982: no. 34), the 'writing-board, property of the Eanna temple' in Uruk already mentioned (Weiher 1988: no. 66; 1993: no. 271), a 'Babylonian copy' of a writing-board (Weiher 1993: no. 80), and 'a tablet from among the old tablets of Meslam', the name of the god Nergal's temple at Cutha (Weiher 1998: no. 241), and even 'a copy from Der', northeast of Babylon (Weiher 1993: no. 185) as well as six 'Urukean copies'. The originals are thus well travelled, but more than that we cannot yet say on current evidence: did scholars travel with their tablets and writing-boards? Were libraries dispersed—sold, even?—on a scholar's death or penury? Did apprentices travel in order to copy? Or were these tablets copied from manuscripts that were themselves made in Uruk, with an original from somewhere else far back in the train of transmission?

Fifteen of the originals are writing-boards and a further five are explictly stated to be tablets, but in most cases the medium is not described. Does this mean we should assume that writing-boards outnumbered tablets 3:1 in late Achaemenid and early Seleucid Uruk, or rather that it often wasn't worth recording that the original was clay? This

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second alternative seems more likely, as two of the five explicitly mentioned tablet originals are rather special ones, including the tablet from the Meslam temple mentioned above.

As for what got copied, the fifty tablets include eighteen extracts from the big omen series such as *Šumma Ālu, Šumma Izbu*, and *Enūma Anu Enlil*; fifteen copies of well-known series of incantations and rituals, such as *Lamaštu, Bīt Rimki*, and *Bīt Mēseri*, while the remaining sixteen (where identifiable) are mostly medical, lexical, mathematical, and astrological. That is perhaps to be expected, but it is particularly striking that only four of these tablets—less than 10%—are commentaries:

> Word-commentary (*ṣâtu*) and oral tradition; reading from the Series *Enūma Anu Enlil* [...], written and properly executed from a wooden writing-board. Tablet of Iqiša, son of Ištar-šuma-ereš, descendant of Ekur-zakir. [Hand of] Anu-aba-uṣur, son of Anu-mukin-apli, descendant of Kuri. Uruk, [n]th day of Elulu (month VI), [...] of Philip, king of all lands. (Hunger 1976: no. 90)

> Word-commentary and oral tradition; reading from the Series *Enūma Anu Enlil*. From the middle of '(If) in Nisannu (month I) on the 14th day an eclipse takes place and the god in his eclipsing'. Finished. Written and properly executed from a writing board.: Lengthening(?) of lines. Tablet of Iqiša, son of Ištar-šuma-ereš, descendant of Ekur-zakir, *āšipu*. Hand of Anu-aba-uṣur, son of Anu-mukin-apli, descendant of Kuri. Uruk, 3rd day of Elulu (month VI), 2nd year of Philip, king of the lands. (Weiher 1993: no. 162)

> Word-commentary and oral tradition; reading from the Series *Enūma Anu Enlil*. From the middle of '(If) in Tašritu (month VII) the Moon is surrounded by a lunar halo'. Tablet of Iqiša, son of Ištar-šuma-ereš, descendant of Ekur-zakir. (Thureau-Dangin 1922: no. 17)

> From a wooden writing board; *mukallimtu*-commentary to *Enūma Anu Enlil* [...], written (and) checked against the original. Tablet of [...], man of his god Nusku, priest of his goddess mother, son of... [...] Ur-Gula,... lapis lazuli... [...], descendant of Enlil-belšunu, *nêšakku*-priest of Enlil. Hand of [...]. (Weiher 1988: no. 101)

It is also striking that all of these commentaries are on the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*—not a professional specialism of either family—and that three were owned by Iqiša, including two written for him by Anu-aba-uṣur of the Kuri family.

By contrast, amongst the forty-eight tablets in the *āšipus*' house that do not explicitly claim to be copies, nineteen are described just as 'tablet (*ṭuppu*) of' so-and-so, another five as 'oblong tablet (*giṭṭu*) of' so-and-so, and six are damaged but may have originally had either phrasing. Most of these are in fact copies of standard works; indeed all but of eight of them have a 'catchline' giving the first line of the next part of the work, and/or a statement that this is a numbered tablet or section (*persu*) of a series, or that it is an extract (*nishu*) from a longer work. Another mentions a break (*hīpu*) in the original.

In my opinion it is highly likely that the seven remaining tablets from this group of 30 are original compositions. Five are astrological works by Iqiša of the Ekur-zakir family and two are incantation rituals by his son Ištar-šuma-ereš (Weiher 1993: nos. 240, 245). The latter have some parallel passages in other known rituals, but this sort of re-use is

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typical of the genre. Iqiša's astrological pieces are particularly interesting, as they represent a relatively new departure in cuneiform scholarship. The division of the ecliptic—the path of the moon—into the twelve equal parts that we now call the zodiac is first recorded in the Astronomical Diaries in about 460 BC (Brown 2000: 262). The first known horoscope, predicting an individual's life circumstances based on the zodiacal positions of the major celestial bodies at the time of the birth, is from 410 BC (Rochberg 1998: no. 1). Iqiša, working almost a century later, is adapting traditional Babylonian learning to this new mode of thinking. In one text (Hunger 1976: no. 96) he lists constellations which are said to affect the zodiacal signs, organized sign by sign. Another (Weiher 1982: no. 43) is a zodiacal table and set of calculations for predicting birth dates, along with omens concerning neo-natal death under each sign. Iqiša presumably conceived a further two (Weiher 1988: nos. 104, 105), which tabulate days of the month, zodiacal positions, and ritual annointings, as two members of a set of twelve. And in the last one (Weiher 1993: no. 159) Iqiša equates each of the twelve major ominous zones of the liver, as defined in extispicy, with a god, a month, and a constellation.

The final eighteen tablets without explicit copying-statements in their colophons—that is, some 37% of them—feature the words and phrases 'word-commentary' (*ṣâtu*), 'oral tradition' (*šūt pî*), 'reading' (*malsūtu*), and '(questioning) of an expert's speech' ((*mašʾaltu*) *ša pî ummâni*) in various combinations. For instance:

> Word-commentary and oral tradition of an expert's speech of '(If) a patient's tongue is red'. Reading of Anu-ikṣur, son of Šamaš-iddin, descendant of Šangu-Ninurta, junior *āšipu*, Urukean. (Hunger 1976: no. 33)
>
> Word-commentary, oral tradition and questioning of an expert's speech from 'If an anomaly—its stomach is located at the place of its right lung'. (Tablet) 18; finished (and) checked. *Šumma Izbu*. Not completed. 'If a ewe eats its afterbirth'. Oblong tablet of Iqiša, son of Ištar-šuma-ereš, descendant of Ekur-zakir, *āšipu*, Urukean. (Weiher 1982: no. 38)

And notably, while all three of the copied *Enūma Anu Enlil* commentaries discussed above were produced by scribes who were *not* members of the Ekur-zakir or Šangu-Ninurta families, the men who actually lived in the house, only four of the eighteen non-copied commentaries (Hunger 1976: no. 84; Weiher 1982: nos. 36, 54; 1998: no. 260) are not by Ekur-zakir or Šangu-Ninurta men. In fact, most are by Anu-ikṣur of the Šangu-Ninurta family, perhaps written as part of his training (but unfortunately none of them is dated, so that conjecture cannot be proven). Further, all but one of those non-copied commentaries is to the three omen series *Šumma Ālu, Šumma Izbu*, and *Sakikkû*, or to medical compendia, as one might expect of an apprentice *āšipu*; the other is to a lexical list.

In short, twenty-five—about half—of the forty-eight tablets that do not have an explicit copying-statement in their colophons are almost certainly not copies of standard compositions. Two-thirds of those are commentary texts on copied works, but a third—all by Ekur-zakir men—are likely to be wholly original compositions. This is not a large percentage of the corpus by any means but is certainly a conservative estimate, for one can also find examples of original textual production amongst the *āšipus*' tablets

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that do claim to be copies. For instance, a long and complex mathematical table, listing pairs of mutually reciprocal numbers (that is, whose product is 1), includes a few out-of-place lines and arithmetical errors (Weiher 1993: 174). Serendipitously, the *āšipus'* house has also yielded a crudely made tablet bearing calculations of reciprocals whose results exactly match a partially mistaken passage in the big list (Weiher 1993: no. 176; see Robson 2008a: 236–237). And yet that big list's colophon reads:

> Unfinished. According to an old original (of?) Rimut-Anu, son of Šamaš-iddin, descendant of Šangu-[Ninurta]. Nadin, his…, wrote and checked it. (Weiher 1993: no. 174)

The colophon is damaged and difficult to interpret confidently. But it suggests this was either an original, flawed composition of Rimut-Anu's, of which his calculation and Nadin's copy survive (but not Rimut-Anu's), or Rimut-Anu (and Nadin's?) erroneous 'correction' of an older exemplar. Either way, there was active engagement in the mathematical content of the text, not simply rote copying for preservation's sake.

Mobility, stability, and accessibility

One outcome of the previous section is that about three-quarters of the tablets from the *āšipus'* house in Uruk were definitely copied, if we can generalize from the 27% which have surviving colophons. We also saw that several of the originals from which the copies were made came from the cities of Babylon, Cutha, and Der. The collection even contains a 200-year-old 'antique' from Assurbanipal's library: a tablet bearing liver omens, with a colophon declaring that the great king himself had 'learned and understood in his heart the diviner's lore, the secret of heaven and earth, the wisdom of Šamaš and Adad' and 'deposited it in his palace' (Weiher 1982: nos. 46). And amongst the colophons of the thirty published tablets from the Neo-Babylonian temple in Sippar are three replicas of texts from deep antiquity. The prologue to the Laws of Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 BC) was reproduced 'according to the inscriptions of a copy of the original stela that Hammurabi, king of Babylon, erected in Susa' (Fahdil 1998), while a votive dedication to the goddess Nanše on behalf of Zambiya, king of Isin (r. 1836–1834 BC) was copied from 'an inscription that is on a bronze buck' (Al-Rawi 2002). A third tablet contains copies of two well-known building inscriptions of Gudea (r. 22nd century BC) and Šulgi (r. 2094–2047 BC) from ancient Lagaš and nearby Nigin, both also dedicated to Nanše (Isma'il 1999–2000; cf. Edzard 1997: 1.7.26; Frayne 1997: 1.2.10).

If inscribed objects travelled long distances then so did the scholars, whether with their writings or independently of them, for the heavy pedagogical emphasis on memorization meant that they carried much of their learning in their heads (see Weeden in this volume for the Middle Babylonian period). We have seen the many apprentice scribes from all over Assyria at Huzirina. Likewise at least fifteen tablets in the *āšipus'* house at Uruk are by scribes that were not Ekur-zakir or Šangu-Ninurta family members,

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including two men from Der (Weiher 1993: nos. 125, 185) but it is a moot point whether it was the tablets or the scribes who had travelled there. And in one case, it even looks as though an entire scholarly institution moved (or branched out), at least once and perhaps even twice: Ezida, the royal temple of the scholarly god Nabu at Kalhu, was created anew at the new Assyrian capital, Dur-Šarrukin, in the late 8th century. It was hurriedly abandoned, perhaps unfinished, with the library only partially stocked, on the sudden and unpropitious death of Sargon II. Another new Ezida was then founded at Nineveh, the next new capital, shortly afterwards. Many of the tablets written for the Kalhu Ezida ended up there, along with newly commissioned tablets, while the rump of the original Ezida also continued to be textually productive to the end of empire in the late 7th century (Robson forthcoming b).

At first sight, then, it looks as though there was constant movement of both tablets and scholars, resulting in easy access to the whole of the current 'tradition' as well as the recovery of lost works from antiquity. And yet it is rare to find complete sets of longer works in any collection. For instance, the large temple library in Neo-Babylonian Sippar—whose tablets were recovered in their original storage niches—contained just Tablets I, III, IX, and XIII of *Lugal-e*, an epic of the god Ninurta whose first-millennium version ran to fifteen chapters (Al-Rawi 1995). At least three of the four were made by one Nabu-eṭir-napšati of the Pahharu family, and all were stored together in niche 3A, along with a copy of Tablet III of the ritual series *Mīs Pî*, which was used to inaugurate and activate cult statues (Al-Rawi and George 1995). Similarly, the Sippar temple seems to have held only Tablets I, II, IV, and V of perhaps eleven chapters of Standard Babylonian *Atram-hasis* (George and Al-Rawi 1996; on the Old Babylonian version of this myth, see van Koppen in this volume). Three were stored together in niche 6A, the other in niche 1D with, amongst others, a manuscript of Tablet I of *The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* (George and Al-Rawi 1998). Only two colophons of the *Atram-hasis* tablets have been published: Tablet I was 'written from speech', while the *āšipu* Nanaya-apla-iddina, son of Dabibu, copied Tablet II 'according to its original'. Even in Assurbanipal's library, none of the four identified sets of the eleven-chapter *Epic of Gilgameš* is anywhere near complete (George 2003: 381–385).

Now, it is almost certain that no single scholarly tablet collection has been excavated in its entirety, even from the relatively intact library room in the temple at Sippar. Quite apart from the accidents of preservation and recovery of tablets, we have already noted the prevalence of long-perished wooden writing-boards in both personal and institutional contexts. Thus it could be argued that most scholars, most of the time, had full access to whatever they were interested in and that it is just we moderns who are lacking the full set of texts, over two millennia later. But George Houston's (2009) study of book collections in Roman Egypt and Italy, based both on ancient book lists and on surviving papyri, suggests otherwise. The Romans too struggled to acquire complete sets of major works, often collected individual chapters from different sources, and did not always store them as systematically as we might have expected. And, as Oppenheim (1960: 411; 1977: 14–15) anticipated, the simple fact that tablet

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collections were abandoned—whether in Kalhu and Huzirina because of major political catastrophes, or in the Uruk *āšipus'* house for apparently domestic reasons—means that hundreds of manuscripts could disappear from circulation in a single event. Indeed, the Ekur-zakir family seem to have been entirely ignorant of the previous occupants' tablet collection, which lay buried in jars just beneath the floor of their home.

Another inhibiting factor in the dissemination of the written word was the injunctions that the scholars themselves put on sharing specialist knowledge. In each of the six tablet collections discussed here, there are colophons that include protective clauses against theft or loss. For instance, the colophon on a tablet of bilingual incantations against the storm demoness Ardat-lili, copied by Ištar-šuma-ereš for his father Iqiša, ends:

> Whoever fears the gods Anu, Antu and Ea shall not take it away, shall not deliberately let it be dropped. On the same day he shall return it to its owner's house. Whoever takes it away, may the gods Adad and Šala take him away. (Weiher 1982: no. 6)

But only thirty-eight of the Uruk *āšipus'* tablets definitely contain such curse formulae in their colophons, while sixty-three definitely do not. (A further eleven are too damaged to read.) As Kathryn Stevens (2009) has shown, almost all of the thirty-eight contain standard, copied works related to the *āšipus'* profession: the big omen series *Šumma Ālu, Šumma Izbu*, and *Sakikkû*; rituals such as *Bīt Mēseri* and *Maqlû*, as well as a few hymns, incantations, and lexical lists. No copies in the house of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, no astronomy, astrology, or mathematics, and no *Bārûtu* or *Bīt Rimki* ('Bath House', a royal purification ritual) had such warnings, and most non-copied commentaries did not either. But conversely, several manuscripts of *Šumma Ālu, Šumma Izbu*, and *Sakikkû* also lack curses, so the protected–unprotected dichotomy is not absolute. Most of the thirty-eight were owned by Šamaš-iddin and Anu-ikṣur of the Šangu-Ninurta family or by Iqiša of the Ekur-zakirs (seven, seven, and thirteen respectively). However, at least five (13%) belonged to non-family members, suggesting that the prohibition on tablet movement—or rather, change of ownership—was not as absolute as the colophons suggest.

But if people and objects were mobile, how stable were the texts they worked with? Oppenheim (1960: 413; cf. 1977: 18) put great emphasis on the stasis of tradition—on works which 'at some point in their early history were frozen into a specific wording and an established arrangement of content'. This standardization or canonization, which apparently began in 'the third quarter of the second millennium BC', 'effectively maintained the [works'] original contents against the pressures of changing concepts and attitudes, preserving obsolete text material that would otherwise have certainly disappeared'. Yet even when Oppenheim was writing, this was no longer the consensus view (although it may have been the majority one). For instance, Lambert (1957: 9) wrote:

> Much Akkadian literature did assume a final fixed form, did become a *textus receptus* [i.e., received text], but not all. The Gilgameš Epic never reached a canonical form, and Enuma Anu Enlil circulated in several variant official editions.

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Let us examine that claim in more detail. As Andrew George (2003: 31) points out, the famous Standard Babylonian recension of the *Epic of Gilgameš* is first attested in the Neo-Assyrian period. Yet older versions survived in parallel with it from Assur, Kalhu, Huzirina, and perhaps also from Nineveh (edited by George 2003: 348–378). Interestingly, all four places also yielded witnesses to the Standard Babylonian recension. But that is not the full extent of the text's flexibility, as George (2003: 419–431) shows: 'variant vocabulary, variations in tense, the addition of single lines, the transposition of lines and, more rarely, more radical reordering are established features of the sources for the Standard Babylonian epic' (George 2003: 430). And other major literary works—the *Epic of Anzu, Atram-hasis*, and *Ištar's Descent*—all circulated in variant versions in the cities of Assyria too (George 2003: 31).

Likewise the seventy-tablet celestial omen compendium *Enūma Anu Enlil* has proved increasingly resistant to 'composite' edition—the compilation of a single-line text from multiple witnesses—as its editors have progressed further into the series. The ancient tablet numbering starts to bifurcate in the low 20s (Soldt 1995), while later sections, such as those on Venus and Jupiter, have to be treated as a multiplicity of variant manuscripts (Reiner and Pingree 1998; 2005). One can adduce a great number of further examples too: later sections of the terrestrial omen series *Summa Ālu* are very diverse (Freedman 2006), while the compendium of cultic toponyms *Tintir = Babylon* was divided variously into four or five chapters (Veldhuis 1998). And although large numbers of divination queries posed by *bārûs* were often compiled into groups, sometimes running over several tablets, it has proved impossible so far to put them into any standardized order (Robson 2009).

However, this should not surprise us as much as it does, conditioned as we are to think in terms of cuneiform 'canonization'. As Francesca Rochberg (1984) argued a quarter of a century ago, the Akkadian terms *iškaru* 'series' and *ahû* 'extraneous' did not connote value judgements about canonicity and non-canonicity. As she showed for the Neo-Assyrian manuscripts of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, the term *iškaru* simply represented material from a compiled series already known to a scholarly community, while *ahû* described similar material from parallel textual traditions that was new to them. It may well turn out that one group's *ahû* was another group's *iškaru*; certainly we must always be wary of the composite edition, 'a text which, ironically, [becomes] "canonical" to the Assyriological world but never existed in this form in antiquity' (Veldhuis 2003: 629).

Conclusions

By turning our attention from tablets as witnesses of scholarly compositions to tablets as artefacts created by historically situated individuals our view of the 'stream of tradition' radically alters. We start to penetrate its apparently smooth, unbroken surface to the turbulent currents underneath. At this stage of research it is still mostly a matter of describing local particularities than attempting to account for them, but by this means it

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will eventually be possible to complement the still vital work of textual edition with a comprehensive historical account of Mesopotamian intellectual culture.[1]

Further reading

Text editions and English translations of many of the scholarly tablets from Huzirina, Kalhu, and Uruk can be found online in *The Corpus of Ancient Mesopotamian Scholarship* (http://oracc.org/cams/gkab). Rochberg (1984), Lieberman (1990), and Veldhuis (1998) are essential readings on cuneiform canonicity. Michalowski (1995) gives important insights into the nature of Mesopotamian literary production. The methodology underlying this chapter is heavily influenced by recent work on the history of the book and the sociology of science. See especially Robert Darnton's work on the book 'communications circuit' (1982, 2007) with the critique by Adams and Barker (1993) on the one hand, and the works of Latour (1987) and Livingstone (2003) on the other.

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CHAPTER 27

TABLETS OF SCHOOLS AND SCHOLARS: A PORTRAIT OF THE OLD BABYLONIAN CORPUS

STEVE TINNEY

It is not the goal of this chapter to cover once again the familiar grounds of scribal education and literacy which have been well-described in a long series of contributions (see Volk 2000). Rather, I aim to chart both well-established and yet untrodden paths through the realm of Old Babylonian literary and scholarly tablets. It is the last of these words that drives the perspective offered here: we look up at the issues from the tablets rather than down at the tablets from compositions and concepts. Naturally, such an endeavour can be undertaken only by reference to the data available at the time of writing, meaning that our statistical perspective should be taken as a basis for understanding trends rather than fixing figures. As a practical matter, I shall tend to approach the subject city by city rather than findspot by findspot: a book-length treatment of the material sketched below would be required to do full justice to every tablet from every findspot.

Despite the prevailing tendency to consider school and literary texts apart from the products of scholarly praxis, we take it as fundamental that it in order to comprehend the overarching contexts of Old Babylonian literate production, it is necessary to consider not only the narrative and poetic texts from contexts of school and worship, but also the documents of divinatory, therapeutic, and purificatory activity—omens, incantations, rituals, and other categories which were generated by the scholars of the time. Monumental inscriptions, and lexical and mathematical tablets (largely excluding multiplication tables, for which see Chambon in this volume) are introduced into the discussion as necessary without being enumerated in detail.

While the bulk of our tablets happen to be written in Sumerian, this is a function of trends in the data, not this chapter's focus. On the contrary, I attempt to evaluate the entire corpus of Old Babylonian literary and learning regardless of language.

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As a final introductory point, the chronological anchors and boundaries of the Old Babylonian period are not firmly fixed or demarcated. In strictly conventional terms, the scope of our coverage might be characterized as 2003 to 1595 BC. However, the merits of the 'middle chronology' have been disputed and lower absolute dates may be more appropriate—1900 to 1500 may well be closer to the mark (Gasche et al. 1998). The difficulty of dating tablets by palaeography means that at the onset of our coverage the boundary between Ur III and Early Old Babylonia is indistinct, and the end of our coverage may shade into Sealand and Kassite times, particularly in view of recent evidence that the idea that Nippur was abandoned in 1723 is no longer sustainable (Dalley 2009).

The raw data

Turning to the raw data, then, we may profitably survey site by site, or museum by museum in some cases, the actual tablet corpus which is the foundation of our discussion. In the course of this survey, I will mention both total figures and figures broken down by one of the major conventional designations used by Assyriologists. Although there will be cause later to subvert this organizational strategy, we will for now speak of Sumerian literature (about 6000 tablets, as essentially defined by Miguel Civil's unpublished catalogue, with a published outline in Cunningham 2007); Akkadian literature (about 140 tablets, as catalogued by Wasserman 2003, not counting his 'laments' and 'incantations', with additions in George 2009); incantations and rituals (about 200 tablets, as catalogued by Cunningham 1997 with additions by the author); lamentations (about 700 tablets, unpublished catalogue by the author); and scholarly texts (about 100 tablets and models, unpublished catalogue by the author). The grand total of all of these tablets comfortably exceeds 7300, over 80% of them Sumerian literature, and keeps growing. In addition, there are about 750 Old Babylonian mathematical tablets of which one third are of unknown provenance (Robson 2008, with previous literature).

It is with Nippur that we must begin our survey of the raw data, the tablet finds that constitute our corpus, for Nippur remains the single most productive site for Old Babylonian literary tablets, defining our understanding and riddling our perspective with biases which we will find it hard to counter.

The Nippur literary tablets stem from two principal sets of excavations which we will call the 19th-century finds and the post-war finds, respectively. The former resulted from four years of excavations carried out by the University of Pennsylvania between 1888 and 1892, during which as many as 60,000 tablets may have been found in total (Bregstein and Schneider 1992). In the absence of proper excavation records, we must make do with the knowledge that the only published architectural plan associated with the tablet finds is clearly an area of private houses (Hilprecht 1903). Whether the 19th-century finds were written in these private houses or were used as fill cannot be determined.

The post-war finds come from several contexts, but the most important statistically was the large private house named 'House F' by the excavators (Robson 2001). In this

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building over 1400 tablets, 600 of them bearing Sumerian literature, were found distributed across seven or eight loci in the rooms and courtyards of a single house. The presence of likely recycling bins containing discarded tablets and pieces of clay suggests that this house is to be identified as a location in which scribal activity was actually being carried out. While this may be superficially similar to the 19th-century finds, there is to date not a single join consisting of fragments from each of the two collections.

The numbers of literary tablets excavated at Nippur between these two series of excavations are substantial. The 19th-century finds account for over 4000 of the 6000 known Sumerian literary tablets; the post-war finds account for a further thousand. In total, then, Nippur accounts for 83% of the total number of Old Babylonian Sumerian manuscripts known to date. Only a handful of Akkadian literary tablets is known from Nippur, with the same for incantations. The lamentational corpus from Nippur is not as insubstantial as is usually thought, even if it does not amount to much more than a score of tablets. Nippur's 200 mathematical tablets accounts for almost one third of the known Old Babylonian corpus of these texts.

Second in statistical significance come the tablet finds from Ur. As many as 700 tablets and fragments, primarily of Sumerian literary tablets, enter our consideration, as well as eighty mathematical tablets. The bulk of these come from the houses at nos. 5 and 7 Quiet Street and no. 1 Broad Street (Charpin 1986). In raw numbers, Ur has provided us with another 10% of our Old Babylonian literary tablets, making 93% between the two sites. While smaller in number than the Sumerian literature, the other categories of text from Ur include several dozen Akkadian literary and medical tablets, an omen text, and a fragment with musical instructions (Shaffer and Ludwig 2006).

Numbers of provenanced tablets coming from other sites in the core pale in comparison to Nippur and its distant second Ur. Besides forty or so literary tablets and three mathematical texts, Isin has yielded the only tablet of incantations and rituals which surely comes from the original context of its use (Wilcke 1985). Of the seventy-four pieces from the 'Scherbenloch' (sherd pit) in Uruk two-thirds are Sumerian literature, the remainder comprising lamentations (thirteen), incantations and rituals (four) and a few pieces whose identification is uncertain, one of which is an Akkadian song (Cavigneaux 1996). One-third of Uruk's thirty mathematical tablets also come from this location.

The Kiš texts, fragmentary and poorly published though they are, are perhaps the collection in most urgent need of proper scholarly treatment. Besides the twenty-eight Sumerian and nine Akkadian literary texts, twenty-five lamentations and four incantations which can be confidently assigned a place in the modern catalogues, the inventories of finds from de Genouillac's excavations indicate that there may be as many as 150 additional tablets and fragments which may be literary or lamentational, as well as 500 or more pieces of copy-books and lexical exercises (Genouillac 1924). The Chicago–Oxford excavations yielded, from distinct loci, a total of 124 school tablets including about a dozen liturgies in Emesal (literally 'refined language', a Sumerian sociolect used exclusively in literary texts, cf. Löhnert, this volume) and even a pair of Akkadian practice letters (Ohgama and Robson 2010). Kiš's sixty-three mathematical tablets make it the second largest contributor of this type after Nippur.

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Modern French excavations at Larsa have yielded three mathematical texts and a dozen or so literary tablets to augment the hundreds of likely Larsa texts from the antiquities market discussed below (Arnaud 1994). A handful of texts known from Lagaš are typically considered to be Old Babylonian lamentations though the palaeography of some suggests that an Ur III date should be considered (Cros 1910). From Babylon come less than a dozen published Sumerian literary tablets and a handful each of incantations and lamentations (Dijk 1987).

Beyond the core, the most important sites, mostly in the Diyala Valley to the northeast of Babylon, are Šaduppum (modern Tell Harmal, yielding sixteen mathematical tablets, twenty-four pieces of Sumerian literature, ten Akkadian literary tablets and a handful of lamentations and incantations; Dijk 1976) and Me-Turan where a fascinating cross-section of forty tablets and many small fragments were found, consisting of twenty Sumerian literary texts, several lamentations, thirteen incantations and several scholarly texts including our best-preserved examples of hemerologies and a liver model (Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 1993). Isolated tablets come from Kisurra (Kienast 1978), Nerebtum (modern Ishchali; George 1999), and elsewhere, including a liver model from Tell as-Sib, adjacent to Me-Turan (Al-Rawi 1994). Similarly, isolated finds of mathematical tablets come from more than a dozen scattered sites across Babylonia and neighbouring regions.

Western collections also contain minimally provenanced tablets which fall into three broad classes. One is the tablets which were being purchased in the mid- to late-19th century by the British Museum, the Louvre, the University of Pennsylvania Museum, and others. These texts are generally acknowledged to have come from 'Sippar'—that is, one or more of the mounds in the environs of that city (Reade 1986). Sippar is also said to be the origin of a group of texts from Berlin (Zimmern 1912; Koppen 2003–04), though there are clearly separately articulated sub-groups of texts within this collection. It is not possible to give exact numbers of these Sippar literary tablets, but the ceiling would be around 600 including all of the text types considered here. They are discussed further below during the survey of correlations between tablets, text types, and provenance.

Less clearly defined again are the tablets which seem to have originated from Larsa (Tinney 1999). Two distinct groups are known. The first consisted of purchases made in the later 19th century, principally ending up in the British Museum, but probably also in other locations such as the Musées d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva. Again, they are difficult to quantify, but it is probably fair to characterize them in terms of scores rather than even hundreds. The second group found its way somewhat later to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, to the Louvre, and to Yale (Dyckhoff 1999). A maximal figure for this group would be around two hundred tablets, of which an unusually high percentage are six- or four-sided prisms. In total then, there may be as many as 240 tablets stemming from Larsa among the minimally provenanced 19th- and early 20th-century collections. Among the mathematical corpus, at least fourteen tablets are likely to be from Larsa.

Two noteworthy finds of Old Babylonian literary tablets come from outside of Mesopotamia proper, namely Mari and Susa. Until recently, Mari had yielded only scattered ritual and literary items alongside primary data relating to divination in the form of models and archival documents. Recent excavations have exposed a collection of Old

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Babylonian school tablets which are as yet unpublished. The profile of finds from Susa consists of thirty-nine mathematical texts and a small number of Sumerian and bilingual tablets complemented by a largely unexploited group of round school tablets. An isolated liturgical text from Terqa in Syria remains unpublished.

The final class of tablets, aside from recent purchases from the antiquities market, may be bundled together as Everything Else. While such a designation may seem trite or trivializing, it is in fact useful to think in terms of the maximal negative status of completely unprovenanced tablets in the Old Babylonian literary corpus writ large. Thus, one can scour the isolated text finds scattered across the globe from Edinburgh to Auckland (some of which, at least, must come from 'Sippar') and come up with only about 200 tablets, even assuming that 10% of British Museum, Louvre, and Yale literary tablets should be assigned to this catch-all category.

Recent antiquities purchases are said to come from Umma, but there is little information to verify this and at the time of writing the Sumerian portion of the largest known group of Old Babylonian literary tablets from this source, the Schøyen Collection, remains unpublished and cannot therefore be taken into account.

While the preceding survey has drawn attention mainly to Sumerian literature, buried among the numbers are included the Akkadian literary tablets which are so few in number as hardly to show up, with the exception of Šaduppum (Tell Harmal). The total number of Old Babylonian Akkadian literary tablets amounts to about 140 items catalogued by Wasserman—mostly stemming from 'Sippar'—with another twenty-two tablets being added by a recent volume of texts from the Schøyen Collection (George 2009).

Curricular tablets

Having sketched the basic facts of the tablet corpus, we may now turn to various approaches to analysing its form and content, beginning with the elements of tablet typology (Civil 1995).

Almost all Old Babylonian literary tablets are rectangular in shape and longer on the vertical axis than the horizontal—the so-called 'portrait' orientation. Such tablets are called in Sumerian *imgida*, literally 'long tablet'. They are usually ruled, exceptionally unruled, and most are inscribed with a single column of text. Multi-column texts are nevertheless not uncommon. A special class of two-column tablets—the so-called 'Type II tablet'—is associated with pedagogical contexts. Type II tablets have characteristic square edges which occur only rarely in *imgidas* and other multi-column tablets. Where such squared edges occur on these latter types the tablet content can often be associated with earlier phases of scribal curricula. Tablets in 'landscape' orientation are sufficiently rare in the Old Babylonian period that this format may be an indicator of relatedness among tablets. Although landscape tablets are relatively well attested in the Kassite period, the vagaries of archaeological context prevent us from knowing whether this practice is anything more than the habit of individual workshops. Another tablet shape

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associated with pedagogical contexts is the 'lentil', 'bun' or 'Type IV': small, round tablets suitable for holding in the palm of the hand and inscribed with short extracts, sometimes rendered twice.

The distribution of Sumerian compositions across the pedagogical tablet types is instructive. The vast majority of Type II tablets are lexical in content, and can be seriated into a curricular sequence as a result of the fact that the reverse gives a longer extract of a text which has already been worked on, while the left column of the obverse gives a new extract (the right column of the obverse is a scratch-pad). The curricular sequence thus defined ranges from copy-books through syllabaries and thematic lists to lists of proper nouns and sign lists (Veldhuis, this volume). Here, in the advanced parts of the lexical curriculum at Nippur, we find the interface between the lexical and the literary, with exemplars of Lipit-Eštar hymn B (ETCSL 2.5.5.2) inscribed on Type II tablets along with personal names, and one exemplar of Lipit-Eštar hymn A (ETCSL 2.5.5.1) on the reverse of a Type II tablet whose obverse gives a portion of the sign list Proto-Ea (Veldhuis 1997).

These two Lipit-Eštar hymns each connect with other compositions marked by pedagogical features (Tinney 1999). On the one hand, the 'Tetrad' is a group of four short hymnic texts, including Lipit-Eštar B, Iddin-Dagan B, Enlil-bani A and Nisaba A (ETCSL 2.5.5.2, 2.5.3.2, 2.5.8.1, 4.16.1), all of which are attested on lentils, either from Nippur or from other sites. In some curricular sequences, at least, some or all of the Tetrad texts were the elementary Sumerian compositions first encountered by trainee scribes. The other group, the 'Decad', consists of ten compositions, with some local substitutions. Decad texts are of a similar length (about 100 lines), have relatively large numbers of sources (about 100 each, particularly *imgidas*) and exhibit a variety of pedagogical quirks. The co-occurrence of Decad texts on a variety of so-called 'collective' tablets further indicates their cohesiveness as a group, as does their listing at the outset of several catalogues. While the suggestion that these 'curricular catalogues' are in fact tablet inventories may mitigate the utility of the catalogues as direct evidence for the curricular sequence of the Decad relative to other groups (Delnero 2010), it does not undermine the cohesiveness of the group or its overall pedagogical significance.

A further group of tablets associated with pedagogical activity has been dubbed the 'House F Fourteen' (Robson 2001). This group is distinguished by being based on archaeological context, since it is defined as the compositions which predominate among the tablet finds in House F at Nippur. The House F Fourteen forge additional connections between curricularly-structured catalogues and pedagogical practice. No fewer than eight of the fourteen occur contiguously as entries 11 to 18 in the Louvre catalogue (ETCSL 0.2.2). In Catalogue N2 (ETCSL 0.2.1) they fall into two groups, the first group less well defined, though eight of them occur between entries 17 and 26. The omission of *Lugal-e* (ETCSL 1.6.2) from Catalogue N2 is inexplicable unless one assumes that it is a haplography caused by the similar start of the incipit (first line) of Šulgi B (ETCSL 2.4.2.2); the Louvre catalogue lists Šulgi B and *Lugal-e* as entries 17 and 18.

Again, these catalogues can be both inventories and structured according to curricular principles, and the general correspondence between catalogue blocks and the contents of House F provides further support of this at the same time as the variations

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caution us to sustain a nuanced perspective on the curricula in various houses and cities rather than constructing The Curriculum as a reification. Indeed, if the catalogues are simply or primarily inventories, this may strengthen the case for assuming close bindings between members of sets of texts listed contiguously in catalogues, since the inventories would provide prima facie evidence for the sometime physical connections between tablets containing those texts. Consideration of what may be curricular literature therefore extends to the entire contents of these key lists of compositions. The literature surrounding the scribal school is a case in point. Not only are the Sumerian dialogues and debates collected in sub-groups within the curricular catalogues, but one of these works—*Schooldays* (ETCSL 5.1.1)—also occurs on Type II tablets at Nippur, reinforcing the connection with scribal education which is the focus of several of the scribal dialogues and also features in the Tetrad, particularly in Lipit-Eštar hymn B.

Further groups of texts crop up in the curricular catalogues. One consists of six 'city laments' (including *The Cursing of Agade*, ETCSL 2.1.5), two of which exhibit the characteristic distributional profile of longer literary texts used in scribal education—several large tablets originally containing the entire text, and many *imgidas* each giving a daily practice extract. In the Louvre catalogue, the last fourteen texts are subsumed under the Sumerian subscript *narua*, literally 'stela' or 'monument' (Flückiger-Hawker 1996). These are texts which were almost certainly originally composed as monumental inscriptions and were subsequently used in scribal education—manuscripts of these compositions are often on short-line tablets, reinforcing the connection with monumental text formats (Tinney 1995). The inclusion of these compositions in scribal curricula may be motivated, at least in part, by the connections between the *narua* genre and some elements, at least, of the Gilgameš traditions. The *res gestae* of the Uruk patriarchs, Enmerkar, Lugalbanda, and Gilgameš (ETCSL §1.8), also occupy a block of the curricular catalogues, though certain Gilgameš texts—*The Death of Gilgameš* (ETCSL 1.8.1.3) and *Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven* (ETCSL 1.8.1.2)—are conspicuous by their omission from that block.

Not all compositions which were used in scribal curricula are listed in the curricular catalogues, which focus on narrative and hymnic literature. Three substantial groups of additional compositions must also be considered here: epistolary collections; proverbs; and collections of minor texts.

The proverbs—which actually range from one-line aphorisms to short exercises in rhetorical construction—have been extensively studied (Veldhuis 2000; Taylor 2005; Alster 2009). The case for their curricular construction rather than real-world origin has been forcefully argued if not completely accepted, but what is not disputed is that their frequent occurrence on lentils is one indicator of their function in scribal curricula. The various collections of proverbs do not exhibit a uniform distribution across sites or tablet types, nor do they have identical distributional profiles. The Proverb Collection 1 (ECTSL 6.1.1), for example, has over eighty sources while other collections are attested only on single tablets. Local preferences and ad hoc exercises clearly inform the composition of this sub-corpus in which repertoires of maxims may be recombined in various ways. While the minor texts—fables, songs, short tales, and others—have not yet been

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adequately studied, their place in the overall distribution of the corpus is presumably alongside the proverbs.

Similar considerations seem to apply to the epistolary collections surrounding the decline of the Ur III state and the rise of Isin, known as the Royal Correspondence of Ur (Huber Vulliet in this volume) or the Correspondence of the Kings of Ur (Michalowski 2011). About two dozen distinct letters may be identified, some of which are local variations on themes familiar from others in the collections. Again, local preferences are evident, with certain letters or letter-sequences favoured at Nippur, and others attested only at Ur or Susa. Typologically, there is a relatively high incidence of collective tablets giving one or more sequences of missive and response, but there are striking instances also of tablets with the square edges and emphatic rulings that are characteristic of some of the earlier phases of scribal education. Like the dialogues and disputations, the Correspondence of the Kings of Ur may have provided a pedagogical trajectory selected in some environments as well as, or instead of, the Tetrad.

The purpose of the foregoing discussion is in part to delineate the extent of the portion of Sumerian literature whose extant remnants—if not original purpose—were part of the scribal curricula of Nippur and other sites. There is another purpose, though, which is to enable us to gauge the statistical significance of this portion of the corpus in the context of our overall assessment of Old Babylonian literature and learning.

Of the 550 or so compositions considered to be the core of Sumerian literature, about 175 can be categorized as curricular, but the fact that most of these occur in a multiplicity of sources yields the striking result that the total number of tablets accounted for by these curricular compositions is 3580, or almost 60% of the total Old Babylonian Sumerian literary tablet corpus. This statistical predomination of the curricular compositions, however, does not imply popularity or widespread utilization. When one considers that education must often have been carried out in groups of several students, each of whom may have written the same extract several times, one must face the possibility that even ninety fragments of *imgidas* from Nippur each containing a thirty-line extract from a 300-line composition could represent only a single use of a composition within a single curricular sequence in a single schoolroom. While we surely only have partial data, we nevertheless cannot allow ourselves to extrapolate from the fervid scribblings of bureaucratic schoolchildren to a general popularity of their subjects. To judge by the evidence from House F, the 19th-century Nippur finds may come from only a few houses within a few decades, and our perceptions must be calibrated accordingly.

Tablets from praxis

We must pass now from the well-ploughed fields of the curricular literature into the thorny thickets of the non-curricular, for the remnant of our tablet corpus preserves a wide range of compositions and artefacts used in liturgical, magical, or divinatory contexts.

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The Old Babylonian liturgical corpus devolves into two parts, as becomes clear from a study of the physical typology of the tablets, from collective tablets giving multiple compositions, and from the scope of tablet inventories covering the various categories of compositions. The shared feature of all the liturgical texts is that they typically contain performative rubrics—*gišgigal*, *sagida*, etc.—and generic or performative subscripts—*eršemma*, *adab*, etc.—indicating that at some point in the life cycle of the composition there was a connection with worship or ritual of some kind. Without wishing to prejudice the discussion too much, it is convenient to label the first part 'hymnic' liturgies, and the second part 'lamentational' liturgies (Tinney forthcoming c).

Because works of both groups frequently focus on kings or gods, the hymnic liturgies have traditionally been considered along with the curricular texts, resulting in studies of such slices as the 'Ur-Namma corpus' (Flückiger-Hawker 1999). While this is a legitimate strategy for practical purposes, a greater awareness is required of the ways in which such configurations mask the relationship between compositions and their utilization, in turn eliding or unjustifiably merging ideological or functional aspects of the texts which relate not to their shared reference to a king or god, but to their shared role in court, school, or temple.

The second part of the liturgical corpus has traditionally been partitioned off both from the first and from the curricular compositions, and consists of the lamentational literature—primarily *balaĝs* and *eršemmas* in the Old Babylonian period, with occasional examples of *eršahuĝas* and other types (Löhnert 2008, and in this volume). Again, tablet typology, collective tablets, and the scope of tablet inventories serve to reinforce the integrity of this part of the liturgies while demarcating them from the first part.

Surveying the body of hymnic liturgies, then, several interesting distributional features emerge. In the first place, the total number of tablets is far smaller than the number of curricular tablets: 377 as against 3850. At the same time, however, the number of compositions is higher, amounting to about 243. The corresponding ratios of tablets to compositions tells its own story, for among curricular compositions the ratio is 22:1; among hymnic texts it is 1.55:1. In other words, there is almost no duplication among the hymnic liturgies because almost all of them represent distinct compositions.

Second, where there are clear typological groupings of texts, these support the integrity of the hymnic liturgical category. The most important such group identified to date, labelled the 'Hymnic Archive', is a collection of up to fifty tablets from Nippur consisting of *adabs, tigis, balbales,* and *širnamšubs*, as well as less well-attested types such as the *ululumama* and *šir namsipada* (Tinney forthcoming b). These tablets set themselves apart from routine *imgidas* by virtue of their cursive script, lack of rulings, omission of refrains in litanies, and substandard tablet manufacture, as well as by the cohesiveness of their content. This content may be divided into four sections: Nanna hymns; Dumuzi–Inana texts; hymns to minor gods (Ninimma, Nuska and Sadarnuna, and others); and isolated mythological texts (*Inana and Bilulu*, ETCSL 1.4.4; *The Marriage of Martu*, ETCSL 1.7.1). The Hymnic Archive gives the impression of being a collection of texts written as part of internship training.

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In the British Museum, five of the thirty hymnic liturgies similarly form a single group of tiny unruled tablets in micrographic script consisting of an Išbi-Erra hymn (Išbi-Erra G = BM 88492; Michalowski 2005), an *adab* of Enlil for Šulgi (ETCSL 2.4.2.07), an *adab* for Luma (ETCSL 2.3.1), and a *tigi* of Inana (ETCSL 4.07.05) and a *tigi* of Enki for Ur-Ninurta (ETCSL 2.5.6.1). Similar groups likely remain to be identified in other collections.

While it is superficially impressive to have almost two hundred hymnic liturgical tablets, we should still recognize that as a sample of the original production and use of these texts it is surely minuscule, even if the similarities of the sample across cities gives us some hope that it may be representative.

With the lamentations we find ourselves for the first time among tablets not predominantly from Nippur, though the significance of this is not clear. For while lamentation tablets from Nippur number only about three dozen, there are enough good examples of *balaĝs* and *eršemmas* among the published and unpublished texts to indicate that the difference is merely quantitative (Tinney forthcoming a). Qualitatively the Nippur lamentational liturgies fit perfectly with those from other sites. While one might be hesitant to suggest that the quantitative difference is a function of archaeological accident in the face of such large numbers of Old Babylonian literary tablets coming from Nippur, this may yet be the case, and it may be a corollary of the point made above about the probable restrictedness of the numbers of contexts from which the curricular literature came. The excavators at Nippur may have hit only contexts that provide curricular tablets, with lamentations and, as we shall see below, incantations, cropping up only as chance finds in the areas excavated.

The biggest collections of lamentational texts, then, come not from Nippur but from the 19th-century purchases which ended up in Berlin and London. The former are said to come from Sippar and number about 150, many of them being relatively small fragments. While the Berlin tablets require further typological analysis, it is clear from even a cursory examination of them that there are some distinctive groups, indicating that they are neither entirely homogenous nor completely random.

The situation in the British Museum is similar. Analysis of the 150 or so tablets yields a handful of identifiable groups, numbering from a half-a-dozen tablets to several dozen in the largest group. Again, the point is that these are neither a homogenous nor a random collection of materials. Rather, they come from a small number of original loci, most of these presumably in Larsa or 'Sippar'. The scattered texts in collections in Birmingham and Geneva, and the smaller numbers of lamentations in the Louvre and in Yale, do not necessarily add to those numbers of original loci. Joins between a 'Sippar' tablet in Birmingham, the Khabaza collection at the University of Pennsylvania Museum (i.e. the purchased 'Sippar' tablets in the first 2000 CBS numbers in that collection), and the Louvre indicate that tablets from a single findspot made their way from the 19th-century antiquities market to different final resting places. The typological connections between tablets in the Musées d'Art et d'Histoire in Geneva and distinctive groups in the British Museum lend additional support to this point.

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The largest of the British Museum groups consists of well-made *imgidas* which have ruled subscripts but no line counts and no ten-marks (marginalia marking every tenth line of a composition). This group numbers about three dozen members (some assignments are uncertain, and others may yet be identified). While the bulk of these tablets are *eršemmas*, there are several unusual tablets. One of these is one of the few Old Babylonian *eršahuĝas*; another is the so-called *Fashioning of the Gala-Priest*; a third is an Akkadian lamentational text given the subscript *amirakūtim*, which must surely be a form of the word *ama'errakūtum*, 'the craft/repertoire of the mourning woman'.

This tablet leads us to consider the dark matter of the lamentation corpus, for despite the existence of over a dozen Akkadian compositions which might be considered thematically lamentational (Wasserman and Gabbay 2005), this represents less than 3% of our corpus of 600 lamentation tablets. That there were significant groups of Akkadian laments is indicated, however, by an unprovenanced ('Sippar'?) tablet inventory listing twenty-six Akkadian titles summarized as being *ša ama'errakūtim*, and we must further assume that a large amount of the textual production associated with various kinds of ritual mourning went unwritten. The status of *The Song of Agušaya*, an Akkadian praise text with the liturgical rubrics *gišgigal* and *kirugu*, in relation to the lamentational liturgies remains enigmatic, as does the situation of other Akkadian lyric genres which might be considered in this context (Groneberg 2003).

The relationship between the hymnic and lamentational liturgies requires further investigation to establish mythological and linguistic continuities and discontinuities. The likelihood that *Inana and Bilulu* (ETCSL 1.4.4) belongs to the Nippur Hymnic Archive forges one connection across the two groups, for the death and mourning of the god Dumuzi is a frequent theme in the lamentational liturgies, just as the sexual relationship between Inana and her consort is a leading topic in the Hymnic Archive. Scattered mythological texts with restricted numbers of attestations may similarly need to be situated within the same realm as that from which one or both of the liturgical groups originate rather than from the curricular literature.

The situation with incantations is similar in many ways to that of the lamentational liturgies. The Old Babylonian incantation corpus is less than half the size of the lamentations—around 200 tablets, of which almost half are in only three collections: Berlin (30), London (15), and Yale (50). Incantations in each of these collections evidence typological grouping, indicating that they come from a restricted number of loci. Despite a lack of joins between these collections, their shared cultural context is clear from examples which recur in several places, albeit with sometimes substantial variations (Michalowski 1993). Nippur again needs careful consideration in connection with the incantation corpus, for the perception that incantations were poorly known there is not the only interpretation of the extant data. Although there are relatively few Old Babylonian incantations from Nippur, the extant fragments are in some cases from very substantial tablets which must have contained dozens of incantations. Similarly, the collective tablets of the *Udug-Hul* forerunners—against evil demons—contain several hundred lines. Nothing about the Nippur incantation corpus suggests a lack of knowledge of the incantations or a lack of connectivity with the mainstream of incantation

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traditions. Rather, as with the lamentational liturgies, the paucity of incantation tablets from Nippur is likely the result of the excavation of curricular loci rather than those associated with praxis.

An important but enigmatic group of Sumerian literary works which has found no place in our discussion so far is the Larsa correspondence (Brisch 2007), a collection of letters of petition to god and king attested only in tablets which are likely from Larsa (an assumption based firstly on their content but which fits well with the modern locations of the tablets which are mainly Yale and the Louvre). It remains difficult to define exactly where these texts fit in terms of curriculum or praxis, but the latter seems more likely, and the suggestion that they are primarily an inflection of the relations between humans and gods is plausible (see also Huber Vulliet and Brisch in this volume).

Characterizing the Old Babylonian Akkadian corpus provides its own challenges which are clearly illuminated by the Old Babylonian Akkadian sources of the *Epic of Gilgameš* (George 1999). Two of these sources, the Pennsylvania and Yale tablets, are unprovenanced (though said to be from Larsa) and constitute two members of an original set of unknown length. Similarly, the Old Babylonian version of *Atram-hasis* is preserved in three tablets from Sippar copied by one Ipiq-Aya (van Koppen in this volume). Another minimally provenanced source is represented by two joining fragments, one in the British Museum, the other in Berlin and is probably from 'Sippar'. Three fragments are certainly or likely from Nippur, where one of them was found in a secondary context along with the Sumerian curricular texts of House F. The source from Tell Harmal is unsurprising in view of the predilection for narratives featuring the Old Akkadian rulers evidenced on several other Akkadian tablets from that site (Westenholz 1982); the Ishchali source, by contrast, is less easy to contextualize—the general mention of other literary texts being found with it being difficult to assess. Several sources, two in the Schøyen Collection and one in the Iraq Museum, are unprovenanced and we are forced to fall back on the notion of northern versus southern orthographic traits in order to attempt at best a vague determination of the general area from which they come.

All in all, the total number of relevant Akkadian tablets is small, comprising no more than 220, only 3% of our corpus! About one third of these are now at Yale. Besides about forty Old Babylonian omen tablets, that collection also provides a second but smaller collection of thirty Akkadian literary tablets ranging from our only Mesopotamian recipes to instances of the royal 'sacred marriage' genre. The *Epic of Gilgameš* (eight tablets); *Atram-hasis* (three); and the *Epic of Anzu* (three) are the sole representatives of what become the canonical mythological compositions of the first millennium. Narrative texts about the Sargonic kings and local myths account for another two dozen.

Even rarer are examples of Akkadian practice texts in the form of a single instance of a Type II tablet from Nippur inscribed with a fictitious letter to Sargon of Akkad (r. 2334–2279 BC). The extent of Akkadian in Old Babylonian Nippur—less than a score of tablets—is far less than at Ur, where bilingual exemplars of elementary Sumerian literary texts are found along with unilingual Akkadian liver omens, incantations, hymns, medical prescriptions, and other literary texts.

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A grab-bag of items from the lives and works of ancient scholars brings us to the end of our survey of the content of the Old Babylonian literary corpus. The largest item among these is the collection of forty purchased omen tablets thought by Goetze (1947) to be from southern Babylonia, and the relatively large find of model intestines from Mari, which is supplemented by isolated divinatory models from other locations, but with these exceptions the primary documentation from the world of divination is scant. The astronomical tradition which burgeons in the first millennium BC (Rochberg and Steele in this volume) is attested by only three tablets from the Old Babylonian period. Though we are certain that all of the kinds of practitioners known so well from later times were already active as scholars and practitioners in the Old Babylonian period, they remain signally underrepresented in our tablet finds.

Student, trainee, scholar, sage

Having surveyed the tablets and the distribution of their content, we may now turn to the topic of the contexts within which the tablets were created and used.

The most extensively discussed of these contexts is the scribal school. Whether these were larger schools in which students left the house to study with a master, or they were private houses in which bureaucrats endowed their offspring with the ideological wherewithal to become bureaucrats in their turn, it is clear that the mass of tablets ascribed to curricular compositions were written by students learning Sumerian within a framework of bureaucratic training.

What is less clear is the circumstances in which the non-curricular compositions were copied, though most of them, too, are typically described in contemporary secondary literature as school exercises, and recent studies have attempted to extend the umbrella of the *edubba'a*, the Old Babylonian school system, to include at least some of them (Wasserman and Gabbay 2005; Löhnert 2008). The absence of the pattern of duplicate extracts of larger compositions, or of duplicate nearly identical copies of shorter compositions, within the non-curricular corpus, however, strongly suggests that the structure of learning and the relationship of learning to writing was different in the realm of the liturgical and practical texts. Here, the most plausible scenario is that individual interns working with active practitioners wrote texts as an aid to learning or comprehension, to demonstrate their knowledge or to rehearse their command of texts which were to be used in upcoming rituals. The discovery of a brick bin with associated exercise tablets and purified clay in the courtyard of the house of the chief lamenters at Sippar-Amnanum (modern Tell ed-Der) may offer a concrete sense of the context in which this scenario might have played out, although in that particular case only elementary training exercises were found (Tanret 2002, and in this volume).

Another perspective on questions of corpus divisions and tablet contexts is offered by the finds from Me-Turan (Cavigneaux 1999). The exact archaeological context of these pieces has not yet been published, but the tablets are said to have been found in

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three places: as part of surface scatter; a larger group of mixed curricular and practical texts scattered on the floor of Room 30; and a smaller group of practical texts, including bilingual hemerologies, on the floor of Room 10 and the adjacent Room 8. If the tablets are to be taken as a whole, the presence of a collective tablet containing three of the four members of the Tetrad (and a fourth unidentified text), several Gilgameš tales, *Adapa* in Sumerian, liturgies, incantations, hemerologies, and more is extremely interesting, since it crosses curricular and non-curricular boundaries in a unique way.

This boundary-crossing may be more complex than one would think at first glance, for the presence of *Gilgameš and Huwawa, Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven* and *The Death of Gilgameš* (ECTSL 1.8.1.5, 1.8.1.2, 1.8.1.3) may not all derive from the same, curricular, motivation. *The Death of Gilgameš* does not occur in catalogues, and is the most poorly preserved of the Gilgameš tales at Nippur, occurring on only three tablets. This distributional profile is atypical for curricular texts, which in turn may suggest that while *Gilgameš and Huwawa* and *Gilgameš and Agga* (ETCSL 1.8.1.1, not attested at Me-Turan) had an existence as curricular texts, *Gilgameš and the Bull of Heaven* and *The Death of Gilgameš* may not have. The latter text, in particular, may be present at Me-Turan because of its connection with the mythology about the ways in which the god Ea's knowledge was able to persist on earth despite the tricks (*Adapa*) and the treachery (the Flood) of the gods. It is at the outset of the Me-Turan version of *The Death of Gilgameš* that we learn that Gilgameš was responsible for bringing back the knowledge from before the flood as a result of his journey to meet Ziusudra.

It is worth noting that the Me-Turan tablets combine magic and lamentation but show almost no evidence of a connection with divination. It may not be coincidental that a similar division is present in the first-millennium catalogue of authors and texts (Lambert 1962), in which the first entry indicates that both *āšipūtu*—the exorcistic corpus (Schwemer in this volume)—and *kalûtu*—the lamentational corpus (Löhnert in this volume)—were authored by the god Ea.

It is tempting to suggest that a stratified education of the kind posited for the Neo-Babylonian period (Gesche 2001) may underlie this mixture: a common level of elementary instruction in writing, followed by a specialized training as an apprentice. One might posit that the curricular texts at Me-Turan were either tablets retained from schooldays, or tablets used in the initial training of budding scholars at Me-Turan, and that the practical texts and certain parts of the mythology represent the various assignments of an apprenticeship related to the traditions and execution of the intended craft. The range of texts included suggests that this apprenticeship was held by an Old Babylonian *āšipu*.

The traces of *āšipūtu* at Me-Turan bring us back to the admittedly minimal remains of practical texts. It is not clear how many of these stem from training and how many from the execution of the craft, but there is one clear example of the latter in the form of the sexual therapy incantation found broken and buried in a sand-filled jar in the corner of a room in a private house in Old Babylonian Isin (Wilcke 1985). The tablet names the

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individuals for whom the ritual was conducted, and brings us into direct contact with the hands of the experts.

If we can see the hand of the teacher, the student, the expert and the apprentice, then, there is yet one group whose product we see almost exclusively at second-hand, and these are the literati who must have composed at least those texts which did not begin their life in curricular or practical contexts. Such individuals must have existed in some established relationship to the ruler or to the god, creating original works for use in monuments or rituals—we may come closest to them in the texts created for use on statues and stelae which passed into the curricular '*narua* literature' even though the bulk of the primary instantiations of the documents they created—Laws of Hammurabi aside—have been lost, perhaps for ever. They are the sages who would have had the erudition to author documents like *Enlil diriše* (ETCSL 2.5.4.1) and *The Nippur Lament* (ETCSL 2.2.4), to translate the *Epic of Anzu* and the *Epic of Gilgameš* from Sumerian antecedents into their Akkadian counterparts, and to re-inscribe the mythology of *Enki and Ninmah* (ETCSL 1.1.2) within the framework of *Atram-hasis*. Trained perhaps in the curricular schooling but rising above it to the top of their profession, some of them may be known to us by name without our realizing either their creative role or the influence their knowledge enabled them to wield in affairs of state. They are the *éminences grises* of our corpus.

Broader contexts

We have passed now from the tablets, to their content, to the hands that made and wrote them, and it is time to consider certain important aspects of the suspension of the corpus in its contexts.

To begin with, there is the spatial dimension. We have repeatedly drawn attention to the differential specificities of the data from various sites, but we must also consider the question of local particularities as against supra-local commonalities in terms of the likely composition of the Old Babylonian literary corpus which we may project despite the inconsistencies in our data.

It is convenient to identify three classes of relationships among compositions here. First, elementary compositions, particularly the Tetrad, and certain lexical texts and mathematical tables exhibit a high degree of stability across a relatively wide range of origins. Sources of the Tetrad from Nippur, Ur, Isin, Uruk, Larsa, Kiš, Me-Turan, and other sites duplicate each other closely. The same applies to lexical lists such as the wood and tree list Giš, and to multiplication and metrological tables. The close proximity of such texts indicates that there was some level of directly shared tradition across southern Babylonia with outcrops beyond. Second, more advanced curricular compositions and non-curricular texts exhibit a far lower degree of shared utilization and less textual stability, ranging from sharing basic story lines which are presented with different emphases, to sharing little more than an incipit, general plot point, or core mythologeme.

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Such compositions suggest shared elements of traditions which were adaptable for local use and perhaps for individual performances in specific instances of rituals. Third, there is ample if sparse evidence to indicate that there were strictly local traditions which found their way onto clay perhaps only once. Reconstructing the extent of such local traditions based on interpolation from our existing data points is extremely difficult. While we might be tempted to believe that the homogeneities in our finds indicate a suppression of local productions, we must consider the synchronic chronological dimension of our corpus in combination with spatial distributions in order to place this issue in its proper perspective.

Recall that we are concerned with a span of about four hundred years. Recall further that the consistent pattern of evidence for the origins of curricular and non-curricular tablets suggests that the finds stem from a relatively small number of loci. From Nippur, the bulk of our finds could easily come from three or four rooms; the tablets in the British Museum perhaps from ten or a dozen findspots; and so on. Recall further, that these clusters are in some cases roughly contemporaneous—Ur, Isin, Me-Turan, and Nippur all probably date to the same half-century. The non-curricular tablets are harder to date, though there is a tendency to consider them 'later' rather than 'earlier'. Nothing from the first 150 years; curricular literature from the following decades; another gap; non-curricular literature in clutches of two to thirty tablets from a few score of distinct loci over the following two centuries. Although no doubt isolated finds in our corpus come from the gaps, when one considers the distribution of the corpus components over time in this manner, one cannot but face the fact that our actual coverage is extremely spotty. In view of this distribution, we cannot predict the non-existence of local compositions based on their limited attestation.

Two diachronic questions also merit brief consideration: where did the Old Babylonian corpus come from, and where did it go? There is not space here to consider these questions exhaustively, but a few key points may be made.

One is that despite the dearth of comparable material from the third millennium, both continuities and discontinuities are clear. In the lexical traditions, the Early Dynastic lists are quite different from the Old Babylonian lists (with essentially no evidence for the intervening span). Nevertheless, a few Old Babylonian tablets from Nippur preserve Early Dynastic versions of the lists indicating some level of knowledge of prior traditions (Veldhuis 2010). Similarly, while the bulk of the Sumerian curricular corpus reflects Ur III and Old Babylonian creations, isolated texts go back to Early Dynastic versions—*The Instructions of Šuruppak* (ETCSL 5.6.1), for example. In the realm of the non-curricular, only very few incantations demonstrate Early Dynastic connections. As far as the Akkadian corpus is concerned, among the newly written material is much which is translated or adapted from the Sumerian corpus. The identification of some Old Akkadian spellings in Old Babylonian tablets of the *Epic of Gilgameš* is intriguing but insufficient to reconstruct Old Akkadian prototypes for these texts.

As far as what happens after the Old Babylonian period is concerned, the lexical traditions and the Akkadian non-curricular and literary corpora may be considered together, for here the Old Babylonian data continues in some form over the following two millennia (see Sassmannshausen 2008 for a survey of the literary materials from the

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latter half of the second millennium). The tradition is never a matter of verbatim handing down of inviolable texts, but in the realm of lexical, liturgical, magical, divinatory, and Akkadian literary texts the picture is consistently that the prior versions are recognizably related to the later ones in spite of often substantial revision and embellishment.

In the Sumerian corpus the situation is very different—and this applies both to curricular and non-curricular Sumerian—for the survivals in Sumerian are the exceptions. Out of almost six hundred catalogued Sumerian compositions, only a handful are known in the first millennium: the Ninurta mythology (ETCSL §1.6; presumably because of its association with kingship); *Enki and Ninmah* (ETCSL 1.1.2); and a handful of others. All the rest—*Enmerkar*, *Lugalbanda*, *Gilgameš* (in Sumerian), the scores of hymns to kings and gods, the epistolary collections, the dialogues and disputes, and the vast majority of the proverbs and rhetoric collections—disappear after the end of the Old Babylonian period. Much the same happens to Old Babylonian mathematics. Since tablet-recycling means that most preserved tablets were written immediately prior to the destruction or discontinuation of the context of their production and use, we are forced to the conclusion that we are looking at the death mask of Sumerian literature.

Conclusion

Perhaps this point serves as a fitting conclusion to our attempts to offer a complete sketch of the entire realm of non-administrative textual production in the Old Babylonian period. Much work remains to be done, particularly in elaborating the nature and extent of the relationships between Akkadian and Sumerian corpora, and the mechanics of the transfer of knowledge within southern Babylonia—at present we can but guess at the ways in which the continuities and discontinuities we have discussed map onto the interactions of individuals, institutions, and polities. Nor, of course, can an account such as this ever be truly complete, for in Old Babylonian literature and learning as in so many other things, the only constant is change.

Further reading

While there is no single work which systematically elaborates a more detailed coverage of the above material, several of the items both in and beyond the bibliography make good entry points to the larger literature. For Sumerian literature and the schools, the fundamental essays by Miguel Civil (1977) on lexicography and the corpus and Åke Sjöberg (1977) on the schools are still worth reading. For incantations, the Old Babylonian chapters of Cunningham (1997) are the only real survey, and for the liturgical texts Jeremy Black's (1991) essay provides a valuable introduction. The Old Babylonian Akkadian literature is given a good introduction in Wasserman (2003), and is now being edited online by the *Sources of Early Akkadian Literature*

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project (www.seal.uni-leipzig.de). The mathematical traditions are best accessed through Robson (2008).

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CHAPTER 28

ADAPTING TO NEW CONTEXTS: CUNEIFORM IN ANATOLIA

MARK WEEDEN

Scribal education was predominantly in Sumerian in the earlier part of the second millennium in Mesopotamia, and the vast lexical texts to be learned by the students while learning to write represented a fundamental element of the transmission of Mesopotamian cultural knowledge. Scribes were not just learning an abstract set of signs, they were learning a repertory of ways of writing for artefacts of Mesopotamian cultural heritage (Veldhuis 2004). This provided them with access to elite social standing, and to an exclusive community of knowledge and text. At the same time, copies of the same lexical texts and evidence for scribal training along similar lines to those of Mesopotamia have been found from Egypt to Anatolia to Iran, wherever cuneiform writing is found. The following is an attempt to trace some of the developments in that corpus of knowledge and training when it left the confines of its initial area of relevance and was received in Anatolia by the Hittites, as well as to draw inferences about the semiotic and sociological context of the wholesale import of a large-scale technocratic apparatus from one culture into another.

Ancient west Asia has been theorized as part of a 'world system' during several of its periods, particularly the Early Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age (Frank 1993). This approach attempts to view common cultural practices over large areas as being dependent on and derived from a single system of labour distribution, which encompasses smaller and larger, core and periphery sub-systems, commonly but not necessarily identified with geographical units, all constantly vying for influence over the larger and overarching super-system. While it is not entirely clear to me that a system-theoretical approach is ultimately exhaustive in describing the historical rise and fall of networks of 'civilizations', it is perhaps helpful to briefly situate the period and areas we will be looking at against this theoretical background.

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This is particularly useful, given that it is common Assyriological practice to refer to Syria and Anatolia as the 'periphery' from the point of view of the 'centre' of cultural activity that was Babylonia. During the earlier part of the second millennium, this was the case from the economic perspective at least. Resource-rich Anatolia was visited by Assyrian merchants who set up trading colonies to bring back silver to Mesopotamia. Despite leaving copious numbers of clay tablets with specifically Old Assyrian cuneiform, they left no trace of having engendered enduring practices of writing in the local Anatolian population or their elites. After the middle of the second millennium, the Hittites decisively stepped into control of Anatolia's resource production and trade, from a vantage point in central Anatolia, thus ascending to the level of an economic core state within the western Asiatic state system. This status they shared with the other great powers of the time: Egypt, Babylonia, later Assyria, and temporarily Mittani. With the exception of Mittani, these did not then become peripheral to the core represented by the Hittites, or indeed by any of the others. Indeed, the cuneiform writing that the Hittites adopted to communicate with other west Asian powers is entirely Babylonian, although transformed into a powerful but irrevocably local idiom, which ultimately failed to survive.

Numerous studies have emphasized the internationalist high culture enjoyed by the ruling classes of these territorial superpowers (e.g. Mieroop 2007). The trappings of this culture served the function of ruling class self-constitution and self-identification across borders and languages. As we shall see, however, class composition among the Anatolian elite was not necessarily the same as that in Mesopotamia, presumably in the first half, but definitely in the second half of the second millennium. This is reflected through the role played by cuneiform writing in this constitutive process.

The institutional and social context of scribal education in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia

The scribal school of the Old Babylonian period was known as the *edubba'a*, a Sumerian term which is frequently translated 'tablet house', but perhaps ought to be translated 'house which distributes the tablets' (Volk 1996; 2000). Among the literary works that the scribes had to learn by heart in Old Babylonian Nippur were a number of Sumerian compositions giving detailed descriptions of life at a scribal school. These so-called '*edubba'a* texts' have usually been interpreted as reliable primary sources for school life in the Old Babylonian period (Charpin 2008), though there is some discrepancy between the institutions described in the *edubba'a* texts and the archaeological contexts in which most school texts occur. While the *edubba'a* texts sometimes appear to open a window onto expansive institutions with regulations and personnel to implement them, what scholars have referred to as 'a secular university' (Landsberger 1958), the Old Babylonian

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houses in which large numbers of school tablets have been found are clearly domestic dwellings (Robson 2001; 2002).

This anomaly has been explained by A.R. George: the *edubba'a* texts describe school life in a world long gone, that of the establishment of the *edubba'a* as an institution in the time of Šulgi of Ur (r. 2094–2047 BC) and its continuation during the period of the kings of Isin (George 2005). Their continued use in the Old Babylonian and Middle Babylonian periods, from which most tablets containing them stem, on this theory would have to derive from their canonization as part of the school curriculum. It is however, not at all certain that the *edubba'a* texts were composed in the Ur III period. It is quite possible that they refer to an imagined scholastic environment that is itself informed by literary models. One might compare the imagined social environment depicted by Roman elegiac love poets, which was itself as much a product of their fascination with Hellenistic poetry as it was a reflection of and engagement with the world around them.

As yet unnoted in the discussion on the nature of the *edubba'a* in the Old Babylonian period is a letter that gives direct testimony to the functioning of scribal education. It belongs to an unprovenanced group of tablets held in various museum collections around the world which all appear to hail from the archive of an extended family enterprise settled mainly in Lagaba near Babylon. Although this is a contemporary letter referring to school activity, and thus far more potent a piece of evidence than canonical literary compositions most likely referring to a reality long gone, we should not forget the proviso that letter-writing, in antiquity as today, frequently includes literary flourish and can itself have its content dictated by genre. Most of the day-to-day details of the following piece are unlikely to be owed to such concerns, however:

> Say to the master, whom Marduk will make live: here is Marduk-muballiṭ. May Šamaš and Marduk keep you alive always. With regard to the basket of tablets that you had Ilšu-muballiṭ bring after me (or: that you had Ilšu-muballiṭ the servant bring to me), he has not yet approached me, he has not yet brought the basket of tablets. [As soon a]s he arrives here, I will ask [the ma]n (of the house) to take the basket of tablets you sent me, and no-one will open that basket of tablets until you arrive here. On the third or fourth (day) I will come to the *edubba'a* and I shall recite the **ĝá-nu** and I will [make] nice my text of the **ĝá-nu** which you left for me. (Frankena 1968: no. 84)

What is clear from this letter, apparently a kind of excuse-note for late homework, is that there was a place called the *edubba'a* in the Old Babylonian period in Lagaba, but tuition did not take place there. The tablets are sent in a basket to the student at home. It is not opened until the teacher comes to the student's house. The student goes to the *edubba'a* and performs the text orally and quite possibly in writing. Indeed, the text that he will perform, the **ĝá-nu**, is one of these *edubba'a* texts describing school life. There is only one place where the tuition can have taken place, and that is at the student's home. This fits the image of a small, private enterprise, in which a tutor makes visits to students' homes and receives them only to test them. The fact that the teacher's house is called *edubba'a* in this text is presumably a term of deference recalling the earlier institution of that name.

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Very similar are also the conclusions of Michel Tanret (2002; 2004; and in this volume) concerning the education of successive young inhabitants of the house of Ur-Utu at Sippar-Amnanum, based on meticulous analysis of the archaeological contexts of the school tablets found in that house. Tanret (2002: 156) supposes that the family employed the same professional scribe to teach their child the basic curriculum for writing cuneiform as they also employed to keep their books.

Neither Tanret's study nor our letter from a satellite town around the metropolis of Babylon in any way supports the contention that scribal education was primarily conducted within the family from father to son. While this may have been true of people training to be professional scribes, Marduk-muballiṭ would have been training to enter the family business, and his family hired a specialist craftsman (*ummiānu*) in order to teach him to write. Similarly, the successive scribal apprentices in the house of Ur-Utu at Sippar were training to take over their father's trade, that of the 'lamentation singer' or gala.maḫ. It appears that cuneiform writing was far more broadly understood and used among urban Babylonians than one might expect given the arduous path of scribal education (Wilcke 2000).

The Old Babylonian Mesopotamian curriculum itself is treated in detail elsewhere in this book (e.g. by Veldhuis). Here it should suffice to recapitulate a few points. While it appears that Akkadian literary texts played a role in Babylonian curricula from the time of Rim-Sin of Larsa (r. 1822–1763 BC) onwards (Robson 2001), it is clear that the bulk of the curriculum concerned Sumerian. The first advanced stage of the curriculum for apprentice scribes as attested at Nippur, the so-called Tetrad, was made up of Sumerian praise poems in homage of the kings of Isin, for example. The earlier stages of the curriculum, notably the lexical lists, educated scribes in aspects of Sumerian writing that they were unlikely ever to use in everyday text writing. This was arcane language developed for the school environment.

The social role played by an education involving this amount of obscure and seemingly redundant philological knowledge is largely, although not completely, explained in terms of participation in a 'textual community' (Veldhuis 2004; see also the introduction to this volume). This is not to say that there was a national curriculum of any kind in Mesopotamia (Robson 2001), but the broad inculcation in difficult Sumerian philology using similar texts contributed to the consolidation of a literate class identity across Mesopotamia. This identity was far from monolithic, but rather nuanced according to the specific function and curricular application of the education process as well as according to the particularities of the different geographical areas in which writing was taught.

Here one should not forget the extensive presence of mathematical and metrological education among the school texts found in Mesopotamian school contexts, apparently belonging to both primary and secondary stages of curricular activity (Robson 2002). It has been possible to gauge the introduction of exercises in capacity, metrology, and calculus alongside the increase in difficulty of the lexical lists that the students learned (Proust 2007). While mathematics may not have been quite so important for someone learning to be an incantation singer in Sippar-Amnanum, it is clear that numerical

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competence at least was of primary significance for many of those training to be a professional scribe, meaning that they would earn their money to live by doing other people's everyday writing for them (Robson 2008).

Wandering scribes in the Middle Babylonian period

Professionals of writing could also be mobile. At this point, however, our evidence is skewed. During the Middle Babylonian period, for which we have the most documentation of knowledge transfer for the second millennium, we have very little evidence for scribal education from the Mesopotamian centre itself. Most of our evidence comes from the 'periphery': Assyria, northern Syria, and Anatolia (see Fig. 0.1). 500 years after the Old Babylonian period and its set curriculum starting with lexical lists and ending with ideologically overt praise poems and literature, the material learned by students in Babylonia, as far as we can tell, had changed considerably. There was more Akkadian literature on the curriculum, although Sumerian remained an important part of the teaching (Veldhuis 2000). The basic lists, however, remained mainly the same, although augmented by years of cultural accumulation into much larger entities.

There were also new lists. The vocabulary Erimhuš attained an immense popularity in the periphery. Its oldest exemplars are known from the Hittite capital of Hattusa. Its principle of organization was often associative, meaning that words were organized vertically in blocks according to the similarity of their Akkadian meanings. The function of this list has been thought to facilitate translation into Sumerian (M. Civil *apud* Klinger 2005), and occasional series of entries find an echo in earlier works of Sumerian literature. The central semantic organizational axis of the composition is, however, the Akkadian language.

At Emar on the Upper Euphrates in the 13th century BC a foreign teacher, Kidin-Gula, has been identified, who was concerned primarily with teaching the earlier end of the Mesopotamian curriculum from a private house (Cohen 2004; Cohen and Kedar in this volume). At Ugarit teaching was also done in private houses (Soldt 1995). One curious feature of several tablets written by students of Kidin-Gula at Emar, is the tablet colophon, which is written in a very extravagant, archaizing, monumental type of script (a colophon is a typical appendix to a tablet, detailing the name of the composition, who wrote it, possibly also the date and the name of the teacher or supervisor, see Figure 28.1). Tablets from Ugarit and Emar provide palaeographic charts translating between this type of extravagant script and the regular local cursive (Gantzert 2006). Such are known from later Babylonian practice and presumably had their origins in the Middle Babylonian period in Babylonia. A similarly extravagantly written colophon to those of Kidin-Gula's students at Emar is attested in a fragment from Hattusa:

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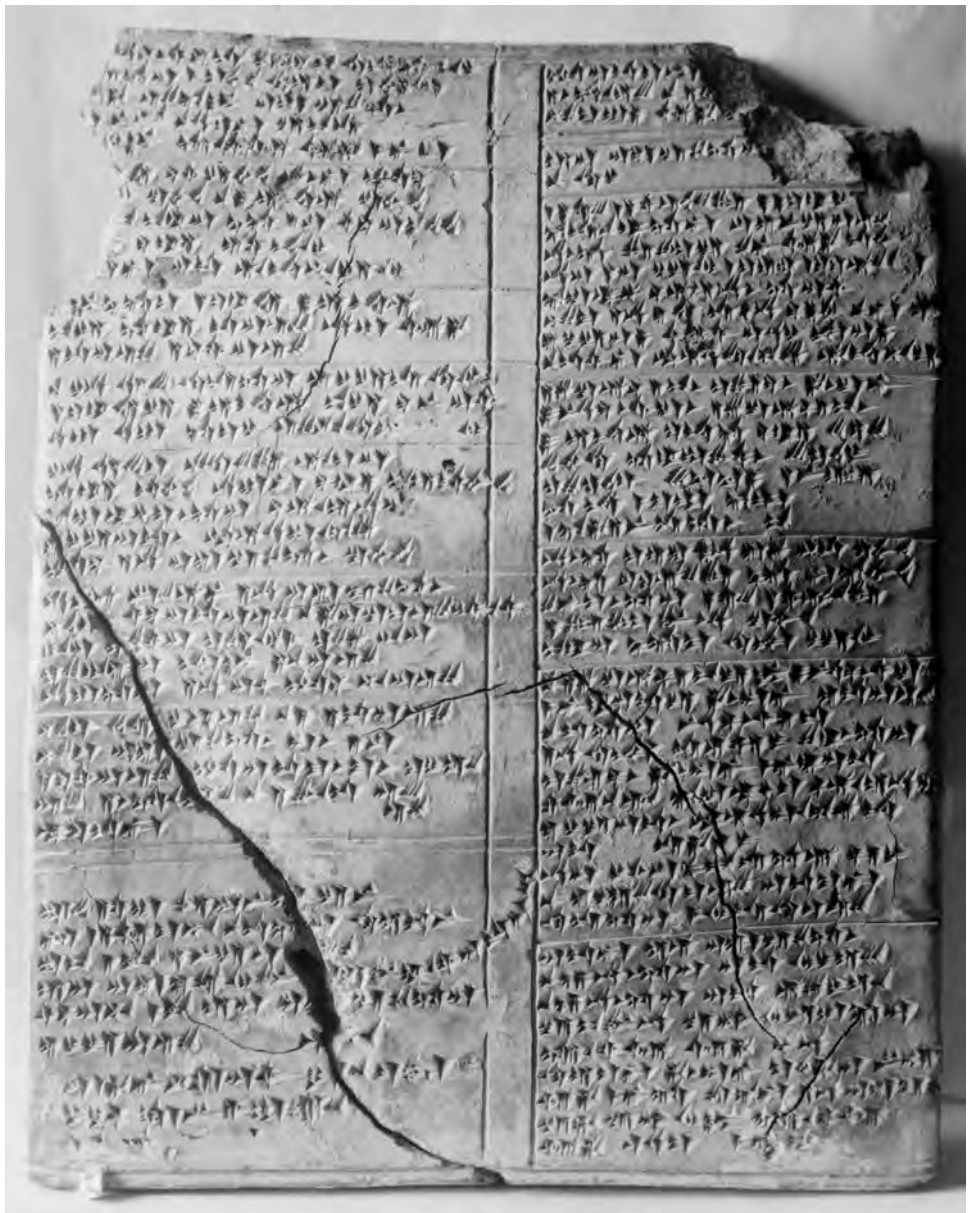

FIGURE 28.1 Typical Hittite tablet reverse, showing, in the bottom left corner, a colophon belonging to the scribe Hanikkuili, active in the mid-13th century BC (Yale Babylonian Collection NBC 2506; Götze 1930: no. 24). (Photo courtesy of the Yale Babylonian Collection).

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> The scribe Ilu-ubla[nni, so]n of Iddin-[...], apprentice in the [...], wrote (it) in front of Zidi. (Weidner 1922: no. 38)

Extraordinarily, the scribe's name is Babylonian while the supervisor's name, as one might expect at Hattusa, is Hittite: Zidi, a well documented scribe of the 13th century BC. This means that by the 13th century the Hittites, situated on the very periphery of the cuneiform community had developed the art of cuneiform writing to such an extent that scribes calling themselves by Babylonian names could be supervised by Hittite masters.

The travelling scribe who leaves his home to take up his profession elsewhere is a potent link in the diffusion of knowledge. From the point of view of modern networking theory, he represents a so-called 'weak link' between information networks (Collar 2007). While his connection to the target network may be superficially tenuous, his effect on that target network is often out of any proportion to his embeddedness in the community. Nevertheless, the kind of changes wrought by the Hittites on the medium of cuneiform writing presuppose a far more concerted and centralized programme of adoption than could possibly be effected solely through the medium of occasional wandering scribes.

The context of Hittite cuneiform

The Hittites were imperially active from a base in central Anatolia from around 1650 to 1200 BC. Precisely when and how they adopted cuneiform writing is currently a matter of controversy. While cuneiform was certainly available to them in the late 17th century, it is unclear whether Hittites were using it themselves or employing foreign scribes to write documents for them in Akkadian (Klinger 1998, 2003). It has been demonstrated on prosopographical grounds that the earliest independently datable Hittite writing was in Akkadian and dates from the reign of Telipinu (r. *c.* 1525–1500 BC) or slightly before (Wilhelm 2005). It has also been suggested that there was in fact next to no cuneiform writing in the Hittite language until the 15th century BC, and that it became standard only from the reign of Tudhaliya I in the last quarter of the 15th century (Hout 2009). This is still subject to debate. At the other end of the spectrum it has been suggested that a form of Hittite cuneiform writing was already in use during the 18th century BC at the Assyrian merchants colony of Kaneš (modern Kültepe), although the evidence for this is currently only one tablet out of the 20,000 excavated there so far (Hecker 1995).

The archives excavated at the Hittite capital city of Hattusa (known as Boğazköy in the early 20th century AD but today called Boğazkale) contain documents in a number of other languages than Hittite. Sumerian, the old language of scholarship, is represented in lexical lists and in obscure phonetically written compositions, some of which were probably imported. Akkadian, the language of diplomacy and new scholarship, is used for international diplomacy and is found in technical treatises, omen collections imported from abroad, and Mesopotamian literature copied at Hattusa presumably as part of

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scribal training. Hurrian, the language of the Mittani Empire which flourished during the early 14th century BC and formed a buffer between Anatolia and Mesopotamia as well as being a rival to Hittite interests in northern Syria, is found in religious, literary, and technical texts. Hattic, most probably the language of the pre-Hittite inhabitants of Hattusa, is mostly found in religious texts. Luwian, a language closely related to Hittite which appears to have been spoken in central Anatolia from at least the 18th century, is later associated with the western regions of Anatolia and gained ascendancy in the whole of the Hittite-dominated area of Anatolia towards the end of the Hittite period. Along with cuneiform Luwian, occurring in spells embedded in Hittite texts at least from the 15th century onwards, there is also hieroglyphic Luwian written in a local hieroglyphic script used on monumental inscriptions mostly from the first millennium BC and on seals throughout Hittite history. Palaic, an older Anatolian language related to Hittite which had almost certainly died out by the beginning of the period covered by the archives, is preserved in religious and mythological texts.

This was thus an intensely multilingual scribal environment, and awareness of the difference between languages, even when they are closely related, is displayed by the tendency to write Luwian words in Hittite texts with a single or double diagonal wedge before them towards the end of the period. It has been theorized that towards the end of the Hittite period, Hittite as a spoken language either died out or was more or less restricted to the ruling elite, the rest of the population speaking Luwian (Hout 2006b). Morphosyntactic changes that occur in the Hittite language in its last phases have been plausibly accounted for as the result of massive exposure to a Luwian-speaking population (Rieken 2006). Such exposure is likely to have come about as a result of the large-scale deportations from the west during the reign of Mursili II, to make up the labour deficit brought about by a devastating plague. Certainly, with the end of the dynasty at Hattusa around or just after 1200 BC, Hittite and the cuneiform that was used to write it, disappears completely. The Iron Age only knows Luwian written in a hieroglyphic script.

Foreign, particularly Babylonian, scribes, or at least scribes with Babylonian names, are attested in documents from Hattusa, as well as from the provincial outpost of Maşat Höyük to the northeast of Hattusa. It has been supposed (Beckman 1983) that foreign scribes were responsible for introducing the script to the Hittites, and some Hittite scribes trace their ancestry to forebears with Babylonian (or indeed Assyrian) names. However, the cuneiform script as used by the Hittites from the earliest period shows a number of systematic differences from that employed in contemporary Babylonia. The presence of families of Babylonian scribes at Hattusa has led scholars to suppose that scribal education at Hattusa was a family affair, as it had been supposed to be in Mesopotamia (Beckman 1995).

However, there does appear to have been an institutional school in the Hittite world: an É.DUB.BA.A, the typical Ur III and Old Babylonian Mesopotamian term for the scribal school, is referred to in a Middle Hittite letter from Maşat Höyük, to be dated to around 1360 BC:

> And I spoke thus directly to Atiunna in the *edubba'a*: Your father is right behind me, he will not turn away from me, will he? (Balkan 1948: no. 65 rev. 8)

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The letter refers to the É.DUB.BA.A as a physical location where a conversation took place, in this case probably situated in Šapinuwa (modern Ortaköy), a sometime royal residence and the provincial capital of the region which included Maşat Höyük. The people having the conversation are both young men, one worrying about having the support of another's father on a particular issue. Further confirmation of the existence of such an institution at Hattusa and in its environs is that the stylus for writing clay tablets is also called a GI É.DUB.BA at Hattusa, as opposed to GI DUB.BA in Mesopotamia, 'the reed of the tablet house', by contrast with the 'reed of the tablet' (Alp 1991: no. 71).

From a later period, the 13th century, we have further evidence for an institutional framework for scribal practice. A tablet found in a building to the south of the Great Temple lists a number of staff belonging to the É GIŠ.KIN.TI. This term has been translated 'House of the Craftspeople', drawing on the Mesopotamian understanding of the Sumerian term, GIŠ.KIN.TI, which means 'work-camp' or 'worker', and ever since it was excavated this tablet has been associated with the function of the building. The staff members listed, however, are scribes, scribes on wood, singers of Hurrian, and priests and priestesses, all professions that may well have needed writing:

> Total 205 members of the House of the Craftspeople, including 18 priests, 29 *katra*-women, 19 scribes, of whom 10 are present, but 9 they did not give, 33 wood-tablet-scribes, 35 exorcists/diviners, 10 singers of Hurrian [...]. (Otten 1970: no. 28)

Elsewhere we read of two 'master(s of the) craftspeople' (EN GIŠ.KIN.TI), Zuwa and Meramuwa, who appear on the colophons of two tablets as the supervisors of scribal apprentices (GÁB.ZU.ZU). If the tablet found in the House of the Craftspeople has anything to do with the building's function, then the building is unlikely to have housed artisans, as is commonly assumed. Far more likely is that this was the city's scribal school (Güterbock 1975), although this can only have been in the second half of the 13th century BC (Gordin 2010). Its layout does not contradict this hypothesis, with a number of rooms around a central courtyard and a narrow entrance indicating a closed institution. Furthermore, twelve metal styli were found in the South Area of the Great Temple, which were presumably used for writing, although it is not clear in which script (Boehmer 1972). The fact that a Sumerian term for craftsman is used in the building's title instead of 'scribe' can be explained by the more general tendency in the ancient world to view scribes in these terms (Houwink ten Cate 1998). Giulia Torri (2008) suggested a building which its excavators named the 'House on the Slope' (German 'Haus am Hang') as an alternative candidate for the city's scribal school, because the designation 'apprentice' (GÁB.ZU.ZU) is found on a number of tablet colophons there. (For the locations of the House on the Slope and the Great Temple (Tempel 1) and its South Area, see Figure 28.2.)

We thus appear to be dealing with a completely different context for scribal education in 14th–13th century Hattusa from that indicated by archaeological contexts and contemporary documents for Emar and Ugarit in Syria and for the Old Babylonian period in Mesopotamia. By contrast with the apparently largely private arrangements at Old Babylonian Sippar, Lagaba, and Middle Babylonian Emar and Ugarit, the Hittite

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organization of scribal education was institutional, whether it was the House of the Craftspeople or the House on the Slope. This is not to exclude that there was scribal education in the family, as it has been credibly demonstrated that late scribes traced their families back many generations to (occasionally Babylonian) scribal ancestors (Beckman 1983). The sheer number of officials who give their profession as 'scribe', however, makes it very unlikely that they were all educated in the scribal art by their parents (see below). Furthermore, we read in colophons how junior scribes would write tablets under the supervision of their fathers, but also under other scribes. There are in fact no cases where a scribe is labelled the 'apprentice' of his father.

There can be three explanations for this institutionality: (1) the Hittites inherited cuneiform and its associated school paraphernalia while the Ur III *edubba'a* was still active; (2) this transformation of the setting of scribal education was a specifically Hittite adaptation; (3) the institutional background owes its existence to influence from an unknown contemporary Babylonian (Kassite) court school. Unfortunately it is very difficult to choose between these options at present. The difference between contemporary Syrian and Hittite practices may indicate that this was a shared feature of the institutions belonging to imperial entities—that is, the Hittites and Babylonians. In this case the scribal environment of the Kassite period in Babylonia, about which we know so little, would be strikingly different from that in Babylonia 500 years before.

At Hattusa they presumably learned cuneiform writing from the same lexical lists as everyone else in the cuneiform world, but one is struck by the almost complete absence at Hattusa of the simpler end of the curriculum. While there are no tablets of *Tu-Ta-Ti*, an exercise acquainting some Nippurite scribes (but not those of House F) with the basic phonetic values of cuneiform signs, and only one possible fragment of one other elementary syllabary, there are fragments of fifteen tablets of the advanced sign-list Diri. Tablets containing metrological and arithmetical exercises are also completely lacking (Robson 2008). On the other hand it is clear that they did know about the elementary sign exercises, as indicated by the unexplained appearance of a part of *Tu-Ta-Ti* in the middle of the Akkadian column of a tablet of the more complex so-called 'group vocabulary' Erimhuš (Klinger 2005).

Very unusually for the Middle Babylonian period, fragments of eight prisms have been found. These cuboid or hexagonal-shaped tablets were frequently used in the Old Babylonian period to write a complete tablet of a lexical exercise. One Hattusa exemplar contains the lexical list UR$_5$-RA (words for objects made of wood) from the first stage of the curriculum. Another two, one with four and one with six sides, have an Akkadian language epic concerning Naram-Sin of Akkad, presumably from the second stage of the curriculum. Handwriting analysis permits us to date the UR$_5$-RA prism to the 14th century, and the Naram-Sin epics to the 15th or early 14th centuries. What is not found are the thousands of small lentil-shaped tablets with extracts of lexical lists and mathematical exercises found at Nippur and Ur in southern Mesopotamia from buildings that have been identified as housing scribal education of some kind. Nor do we find the Kassite period style of extract tablet with part of a lexical list on one side and a line from a literary text at a right angle to it on the other side.

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FIGURE 28.2 Plan of Hattusa. (Modified from Herbordt 2005: 6; original courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Istanbul)

One explanation for this situation may be related to the archaeological context, as suggested to me by Niek Veldhuis (pers. comm.). The vast majority of the tablets found at Hattusa were located in the temple magazines, the House on the Slope opposite the temple, and the palace on Büyükkale (Figure 28.2). These were temple and palace libraries and archives (Hout 2005). Recent work on the distribution of known findspots of tablets across Hattusa indicates that there was a complex archival organization with movement of tablets between various offices and depots.

As a rule of thumb one can say that single good copies and documents affecting the immediate administration of the palace were kept in the palace archives on Büyükkale while the House on the Slope and the Great Temple district were areas where larger

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numbers of copies were kept (Hout 2006a). However, this is entirely dependent on document type.

The archival or library context of the lexical lists, as well as their format, thus suggests that those we have found were not primarily for school use, although they may well have originated in the school environment. Indeed, the Hittite lexical lists display a distinctly philological leaning, perhaps even compatible with a reference function rather than a purely paedagogic one (Hout 2005: 287; Beckman 2001: 86; Klinger 2005).

The nature of Hittite cuneiform

Anyone reading Hittite cuneiform beside Mesopotamian or even Syrian cuneiform is struck by the extreme regularity of the sign-forms.[1] 'Babylonian or Syrian tablets will contain different forms of the same sign in one text. For the older Hittite period, at least, this is usually not the case. Furthermore one is struck by the lack of polyvalence in the syllabary.

The sign PI (for example) is used for the phonetic values *wa, we, wi*, and *wu* in Mesopotamia and Syria, but among the Hittites it only represents *wa*. The sounds we, wu, and wi in Hurrian and Hattian texts at Hattusa are written with subscript *e, ú, u, I* to give *wa* or , *we* , *wi* , and *wu* or . In Hittite texts the sound /*wi*/ is written either with *ú-i* or, from the Middle Hittite period onwards, with the sign GEŠTIN 'wine', Hittite *wiyana-*. Such acrographic means of creating sign values are frequently attested in Hieroglyphic Luwian. In fact the syllabic value *wi*(*ya*) is attested for the hieroglyph VITIS 'wine' on seal impressions from the late Middle Hittite period, early 14th century BC (Yoshida 2006).[2] It is quite likely that the hieroglyphic writing practice influenced the cuneiform one in this case.

Writing cuneiform at Hattusa involved participation in a complex semiotic arrangement. The script differentiates between syllabic signs, used to spell out Hittite words, and logographic ones, which are derived from Sumerian and denote underlying Hittite words, sometimes with a Hittite phonetic complement: LUGAL-*uš* = Hittite *ḫassus*, 'king'. Occasional phonetic writings show that these Sumerograms were at least occasionally pronounced in Sumerian (BA.UŠ written for BA.ÚŠ 'he died'). On top of this, there was also the frequent use of Akkadograms, Akkadian words used in Hittite

[1] In transliterating Hittite cuneiform texts with the Roman alphabet the following conventions are observed: lower case italic = phonetic signs in Hittite language. Upper case is used for logograms, i.e. signs representing whole words rather than sounds. These are divided into upper case roman used for logograms derived from Sumerian and upper case italic used for logograms derived from Akkadian. The latter may in many instances have been pronounced phonetically as Akkadian words.

[2] Hieroglyphic Luwian signs are all given numbers. Logograms are either transliterated using these numbers, or they are given Latin values, written in capitals. This is in order to enable people working on hieroglyphic Luwian to be sure they are referring to an agreed semantic value on an international level, rather than using words from their own languages which will have differing connotations according to idiom. While not perfect, I hold this model of transliteration to be the best available at present.

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texts, which must also occasionally have been pronounced in the Akkadian: *BE-LU-uš-ša-an* using Akkadian *bēlu* 'lord', with the Hittite particle *-san* (Alp 1997: nos. 52, 80). The Hittite for this would have been *ishas* = *san*. This implies an immediate multiplication of the registers in which a written word can function, as well as of the workload of the apprentice scribe.

The insertion of signs inside logograms to clarify meaning is a frequent means of differentiating between discrete meanings of what is essentially the same Mesopotamian sign at Hattusa. In the case of EZEN4 'festival', which is written EZEN×ŠE, and is not attested in this form in Mesopotamia, it is probable that the Hittite word for 'festival', *siyamana-*, lies behind the choice of ŠE as the inserted sign, indicating the presence of a sibilant at the beginning of the word underlying the logogram. This differentiates it from the other main use of the sign EZEN at Hattusa, as the logogram SÌR = Hittite *isha-mai-* 'to sing'.

The Sumerian sign KA can be read in various different phonetic forms according to its meaning. Apart from (KA =) **inim** 'word', Hittite *memia-*, all of these are found in Hittite texts with inserted signs that identify the various different meanings separately from each other. KA×U is the sign for mouth, with U read as Sumerian **bùr** 'hole'; KA×GAG is 'nose', with GAG being the 'peg' representing the nose; KA×UD is the 'tooth', with UD having the Sumerian value **babbar** 'white' (Schwemer 1999; 2003: 12–13). This reassignment of the various different readings of KA corresponds to the observed Hittite aversion to polyvalence, but one case is unlikely to have originated with them, at least not at Hattusa. BÙR 'hole', for example, is never attested at Hattusa, and KA×U is now attested in a tablet with Late Old Babylonian North Syrian script. Nowhere else, however, with the possible exception of the very earliest phases of cuneiform script, do we find this principle of semantic or phonetic indication within logographic writings applied as systematically as at Hattusa.

In at least one example it appears that a logogram has been purposefully created using the resources of lexical lists. Up until the 13th century BC the Hittite word for 'other', *tamai-*, was always spelled phonetically: *ta-ma-i*. In the 13th century someone decided it was necessary to have a logogram for this word, but the regular Sumerian sign for 'other', KÚR, could not be used, as it is already used with the meaning 'enemy' in Hittite texts. This perhaps would not have been a problem in Mesopotamia, but was clearly problematic for Hittite scribes. Therefore a homophone was chosen, GUR, which is only used to indicate the Hittite word *tamai-* 'other'.

Hittite writing and Hittite writers

The previous examples, along with the archival context of lexical material, show just how careful and philologically minded certain scribes were at Hattusa. The practice of the scribal community is so consistent and uniform that it is difficult to imagine the Hittite

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form of cuneiform not being the product of a small and disciplined scribal school. However, this directly contradicts evidence concerning the distribution of professions at Hattusa. The scribal profession is the one most frequently encountered on non-royal hieroglyphic seal the impressions from the Nişantepe hoard excavated at Hattusa from 1990 to 1993 (Herbordt 2005). Of 1262 seal impressions belonging to 280 people, 556 impressions belonged to scribes (44%). This makes up 93% of all 597 impressions of officials of the civil administration.

Clearly not all scribes will have had the same level of education, and this may be reflected in the different levels of scribes that appear to be noted on hieroglyphic seal impressions. The sign for scribe, the most frequent professional designation, is differentiated in as far as it has two, three, or four notches under it, or no notches at all (Figure 28.3). Furthermore, there is a type of scribe with a hook-like symbol above the scribe-sign that resembles the later hieroglyphic sign for 1000. One should also mention the form with phonetic complement (SCRIBA-*la* for Hittite *tuppala-* 'scribe') as well as the 'army-scribe' and the 'donkey-house scribe' (Herbordt 2005). The types of scribe almost certainly reflect a kind of rank, but it has not proven possible to align the apparent hieroglyphic 'ranks' of scribes with the various cuneiform designations for scribe by prosopographical means (Herbordt 2005). One exception is the 'great scribe', numerous of which are attested in cuneiform documents. Nor is it possible to deduce from the use of the sign SCRIBA which type of writing the officials were proficient in using: hieroglyphic or cuneiform.

The scribal professional designation on hieroglyphic seal impressions frequently occurs in combination with other professional titles. One may infer from this that, similarly to Mesopotamia, numerous types of officials required at least some form of writing capability in order to carry out their jobs. The titles occur in combination with 'princes', 'lords', 'chiefs', 'eunuchs', 'priests', and 'incantation priests', but also with 'bodyguards'.

SCRIBA$_{II}$ only appears together with 'prince', 'chief', and high military titles. The titles SCRIBA$_{III}$, SCRIBA$_{IIII}$ and SCRIBA+hook do not appear in combination with any other professional designations on individual seals, but frequently occur on lumps of clay ('bullae') that have been sealed by several people. Given the high rank of these others, one can conclude that these scribes were also particularly important people (Herbordt 2005). These were thus professional scribes, but also members of the ruling class.

While it is not yet possible to ascertain which type of script was used by people designated as SCRIBA, it is notable that the hieroglyphic sign SCRIBA appears to be

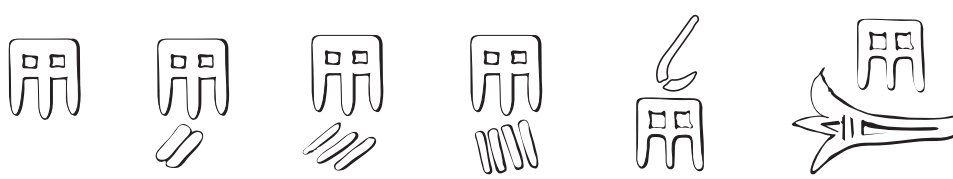

FIGURE 28.3 Hieroglyphic writings of Hittite/Luwian *tuppala-* 'scribe': *(left to right)* SCRIBA, SCRIBA$_{II}$, SCRIBA$_{III}$, SCRIBA$_{IIII}$, SCRIBA+?, SCRIBA-*la*.

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a representation of a writing-board. Wooden writing-boards with wax surfaces were clearly used for writing official documents at least after the Middle Hittite period, although here too it is ultimately unclear whether cuneiform or hieroglyphic script was being used. The frequent Hittite practice of dividing up a cuneiform tablet into four to six columns may also be an imitation from the practice of writing on boards, as suggested by Jacob Dahl (pers. comm.). It is thus entirely appropriate to imagine that cuneiform was written on the writing boards. This practice is attested in Mesopotamia from the Ur III period (Steinkeller 2003).

Certainly by the late Empire period (13th century BC), the hieroglyphic script was used solely to write Luwian. However much easier it may be to contemplate writing on wax with hieroglyphic writing, it is extremely unlikely that the cuneiform colophons telling us that long Hittite language festival texts were copied from a ^{GIŠ}HUR, the Sumerogram used in Anatolia for 'wooden writing-board', should be understood to mean that they were copied from hieroglyphic originals. This logogram is different from the Mesopotamian designation for a wooden writing-board: ^{giš}DA.

Indeed the large number of 'scribes on wood' attested among the staff of the É GIŠ.KIN.TI may correlate with the fact that exercise tablets to learn cuneiform have not been found in significant quantities at Hattusa. A. R. George suggests to me that the 'scribes on wood' may also have been learner scribes, the wood having long since perished (pers. comm.). The above-mentioned distinctions between scribes in the use of the hieroglyph SCRIBA do not allow us to identify a different hieroglyphic designation for the 'scribe on wood'. However, attestations of an É $^{(\text{LÚ.MEŠ})}$DUB.SAR GIŠ, 'house of the scribes on wood', never occur in any relation to scribal activity, and the possible area of scribal instruction that was the South Area of the Great Temple (Figure 28.2) was cleared before evacuation. It is also likely that the so-called 'army-scribes' were using wooden writing-boards while on campaign. Most recently, Theo van den Hout (2010) has proposed that the 'scribes on wood' were simply 'clerks'.

One social difference from Mesopotamia of the Old Babylonian period is that the people requiring these skills do not appear to have belonged to the private or semi-private sector, as did Marduk-muballiṭ at Old Babylonian Lagaba, but to have been bound into the regal state machinery. On the one hand this is likely to be slanted by the circumstances of discovery, given that the vast majority of our tablet finds and the majority of our seal impressions derive from royal and temple archives at Hattusa. The individuals mentioned in these will, of course, have had close relations with the state machinery, specifically that connected with the narrower royal family and its support infrastructure. However, it is notable that in the second largest cache of clay bullae with hieroglyphic seal impressions found to date in Turkey, that of Kaman-Kalehöyük near the western bend of the Halys river (modern Kızıl Irmak), only twice is the sign SCRIBA attested. Kaman-Kalehöyük was a provincial outpost in the Hittite heartland, with Middle Hittite cultural remains similar to those at Maşat Höyük.

The physical remains at Kaman-Kalehöyük, including an enormous grain silo dating from the 15th century BC with capacity for feeding far more than simply the inhabitants

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of this site, show that it too must have been bound into the state machinery of the central Anatolian Hittite kingdom, at least in the 15th and early 14th centuries. Unlike Maşat Höyük, however, there is no royal presence attested at Kaman-Kalehöyük, nor are there any names on seals or seal impressions associated with the known ruling elite of Hattusa. The discrepancy in the number of scribes among seal-bearing officials may thus be a reflex of the status of writing in the Hittite heartland. Widespread writing ability as attested in professional designations on seals, was restricted to those sites that were directly in the orbit of the royal interest, whether that interest was strategic, diplomatic, or religious. It is also quite possible that the designation SCRIBA on the Kaman-Kalehöyük seals refers only to hieroglyphic writing.

Conclusions

It is against this background that we should consider the mechanisms of knowledge transfer to Anatolia. In the hands of the Hittites, cuneiform became somewhat streamlined, but none the less learned. The correct use of cuneiform, and its adaptation to a Hittite model of writing, appears to have still entailed mastery of currently unquantifiable amounts of mainly Sumerian-based lexical material, as in Babylonia, but often complemented by Hittite translations. In other words, it remained a system cluttered with secondary semiotic baggage seen from the perspective of its denotative facility. Second-stage school texts, presumably specialized according to the particular educational path the scribe will have been following, include Akkadian literature, medical texts, but also apparently the copying of Hittite compositions such as treaties, law texts, and mythology, if we can take the attestation of the term GÁB.ZU.ZU 'apprentice scribe' in colophons as an indication of a tablet's having been written in an educational context.

The social function of assimilating such a large amount of essentially foreign cultural information in learning to write can partly be explained as a reflex of a traditionalism associated with writing. Just as Sumerian lingered on in school environments well into the Middle Babylonian period in Mesopotamia, so it was part and parcel of learning cuneiform at Hattusa that one would learn the languages with which cuneiform was associated, Akkadian, and, towards the end, possibly Hittite as well.

On the other hand, in using the writing in the first place the target culture is associating itself with the prestige of the source culture from which it comes. Internally this may mean that the Hittite ruling class, using Hittite cuneiform to communicate both among its own and with foreign powers, but hieroglyphic writing and Luwian language to communicate with its own people, was expressing a clearly coded message of inclusion in an international elite as against exclusion from the local population. While such a message may seem a priori plausible, recent research on the sociolinguistic relationship between Hittite and Luwian and into the origins of the hieroglyphic writing system in Anatolia shows that the situation must be more complex. Luwian itself may have enjoyed the

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status of a prestige language, at least temporarily, and the hieroglyphic script is clearly designed for grand display (Yakubovich 2008; 2009).

The function of the cuneiform curriculum in Babylonia has partially been explained in terms of the cohesive inculcation of a Mesopotamian identity, providing an ideological frame of reference for the urban literati. This culture-specific framework is entirely missing at Hattusa. Indeed elements of the Akkadian language second-stage curriculum texts, some of them being among the oldest evidence we have for texts derived from the school environment at Hattusa, even contain elements that could be construed as anti-Anatolian propaganda by a modern audience (Hout 2006b; but cf. Torri 2009), although this is surely to misconstrue ancient conceptions of ethnic identity. It is quite possible that the Hittites themselves were an ever dwindling minority, a ruling class that considered itself to have more in common with its 'brothers' abroad than with the mass of the population. Under these circumstances, the policy of clinging on to cuneiform writing can be understood as an inward-looking strategy of preservation (Hout 2006b).

This strategy ultimately failed, as it was only Luwian and hieroglyphic writing that survived the end of the Hittite Empire. Interestingly, the Hittite model of the cuneiform writing system, using a less polyvalent syllabary and developing a partially systematized approach to distinguishing between logographic meanings of signs, did not survive or indeed have any influence outside the confines of its area of use in central Anatolia. While it is occasionally possible to detect specifically Hittite spellings or uses of logograms in letters written by Hittite officials in Syria (Singer 2006), the overall register of the sign-forms and logograms used in Ugarit and at Emar is local. This contrasts clearly with the standard 'Boğazköy ductus' used by officials in provincial seats of central Anatolia, such as Sarissa (modern Kuşaklı) and Maşat Höyük (see Fig. 0.1). The introduction of writing at Ugarit has been directly attributed to Hittite imperial expansion in the area (Soldt 1991). Yet the script, syllabary, and logograms of Ugarit are specifically Syrian, although the earlier texts from Ugarit sometimes show a possibly Mittanian character. Indeed, the Hittite chancellery at Carchemish, where the Hittite viceroys over Syria were descended in a direct genealogical line from the 14th-century Hittite king Suppiluliuma I, also used distinctively Syrian cuneiform sign-forms, as far as we can see from the indirect evidence of letters and decrees found at Ugarit and Emar.

The only case where an influence of Hittite cuneiform writing has been hypothesized outside its immediate sphere of influence is in the similarity of script between the letters written by Egyptians, found among the cuneiform archive from Amarna in Egypt, and the script of the older Hittite writing style (Wilhelm 1984; Beckman 1983). However, this is likely to have been due to specific and temporary circumstances of cultural contact, as Egyptian cuneiform letters found at Bogazkoy, dating some eighty years later, display a thoroughly different and independent style of writing. Moreover, the recent discovery of a Late Old Babylonian letter at the Hyksos capital Avaris (modern Tell el-Dab'a) in the Nile delta shows that cuneiform was already known in Egypt two centuries prior to the Amarna correspondence (Bietak et al. 2009).

This has interesting repercussions for the troubled and elusive question of ethnic self-identification in the ancient world (Gilan 2008). The central Hittite power, despite

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having developed a regular and easily identifiable variant of cuneiform writing, did not impose it as a brand on local populations external to its central area of influence. Either they did not perceive this as being peculiarly Hittite cuneiform, or cultural domination by means of scribal homogeneity was not part of their imperial strategy, either consciously or unconsciously.

Hittite cuneiform, despite having a structure that emphasizes the discrete semiotic relationship in a particularly modern, pragmatic way, was not thoroughly enough embedded into networks of knowledge exchange throughout the ancient Near East to be able to survive, or to have any significant influence beyond its central area of use. Its use was entirely bound up with the fate of its ruling class and royal family.

Further reading

Bryce (2005) is a very accessible yet detailed survey of Hittite history, with Bryce (2002) providing an excellent companion volume on Hittite social history. Collins (2007) analyses Hittite culture in comparison to biblical culture. Van den Hout (1995) remains the main work on Hittite prosopography. For the archival contexts of the Hittite cuneiform tablets at Hattusa see, e.g., van den Hout (2005), for seals and sealing practices see Herbordt (2005, in German, with beautiful illustrations).

A short general introduction to Hittite cuneiform is Beckman (1995). Melchert (2003) is a collection of essays on various aspects of Luwian culture, language, and writing, while the standard work on Iron Age hieroglyphic Luwian, with beautiful illustrations of the inscriptions and discussions of the historical and archaeological contexts, is Hawkins (2000). Yakubovich (2009) deals with the sociolinguistic relationship between Hittite and Luwian.

Beckman (1983) remains the standard and pioneering work on Mesopotamians and Mesopotamian scholarship at Hattusa, with more specialized studies by Klinger (2005, in German) on lexical lists and the *Epic of Gilgameš* and Beckman (2001) on Akkadian historical epic literature at Hattusa.

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CHAPTER 29

OBSERVING AND DESCRIBING THE WORLD THROUGH DIVINATION AND ASTRONOMY

FRANCESCA ROCHBERG

Observation and description of the world in ancient Mesopotamian scribal culture expresses itself principally in various fields of divination, which considered many phenomena as signs (Sumerian **giskim.meš**, Akkadian *ittātu*, roughly the equivalent of Latin *omina* and Greek *semeia*). In accordance with a basically bipartite cosmology divided into the above and below, signs were observed on earth and in heaven. Together the celestial and terrestrial signs formed part of a classification of ominous phenomena which did not require any specific divinatory act by the diviner. Thus a distinction within divination techniques was made between phenomena observed outright by the diviner and those resulting from his impetration, for example, by asking the gods for an answer by means of the examination of the entrails of sacrificed sheep, the patterns exhibited by dropping oil into water, releasing smoke from a censor, or sprinkling flour. The objects of interest to celestial and terrestrial divination were phenomena which could be observed or imagined in the physical world without such entreaty. The omens of all the divinatory fields embodied an empirical element in the sense that the things deemed portentous of the future were sought in one or another domain, either terrestrial or celestial, or indeed in the entrails or other impetrated signs. Most generally, therefore, signs were thought of as 'appearing', or being 'observed', as it is stated, for example, in the terrestrial omen series *Šumma Ālu*: 'If a sign is seen in someone's house' (Freedman 1998: 130, ll. 8–10, cf. 12).

An extension of the interest in heavenly signs was the focus on night-time celestial phenomena in the so-called Astronomical Diaries of Babylon from the 8th to the 1st centuries BC (see also Steele in this volume). Whether or not the observed phenomena reported in the Diaries had any practical connection to divination, the fact of their

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observation can be understood as a continuation of the heavenly watch originally focused on omens. Exemplary of true celestial observation for the express purpose of divination, in contrast to the Diaries, whose relation to divination is not clear, was the observational programme which occupied a generation of royal scribes during the Neo-Assyrian period. A further and perhaps ultimate extension of the characteristically Babylonian attention to celestial appearances is the mathematical astronomy of the period after *c*. 500 BC, the so-called System A from the first half of the 4th century and the so-called System B after the middle of the 4th century (Britton 2007: 125) which produced methods of predicting periodic astronomical phenomena related to but not identical with those observed in the Diaries, or the omens.

The modern reconstruction of the Babylonian mathematical astronomical texts has been of profound significance for the history of science because the foundation of Western astronomy is traceable in those sources. Decipherment of Babylonian astronomy also became key to a fuller understanding of Greek and Graeco-Roman astronomy, as illustrated by the fact that in his *Mathematical Treatise*, known today as the *Almagest*, the 2nd-century AD astronomer and mathematician Ptolemy of Alexandria cites Babylonian empirical data used by his 2nd-century BC predecessor Hipparchus. The *Almagest* attests to the fact that Greek adoption of parameters and period relations from Babylonia resulted in the transformation of formerly qualitative geometrical astronomical models into quantitative and predictive ones. In addition, the computational methods and the ephemeris[1] structure of this particular form of Babylonian astronomy, albeit using Greek numbers and the Egyptian calendar, were perpetuated in an arithmetical and linear (non-geometrical) form of Greek astronomy, which was probably used for astrology (Jones 1999). Just as the mathematical astronomy has a privileged place in the history of science, so does the observation of celestial (and other) phenomena for the purpose of determining portents belong to the long history of scientific observation itself. Accordingly, cuneiform evidence for the observation of physical phenomena in heaven and on earth is a legitimate site for the study of the earliest selective attention to phenomena, meaningful within a certain body of knowledge and practice, and constitutive of an attitude about knowing the world through observation that falls within the bounds of what we understand to be science.

Of interest in the present context is that unifying the production of all the Babylonian astral sciences—celestial divination, horoscopy, and observational (non-mathematical, non-tabular) and (tabular) mathematical astronomy—was the cuneiform scribal culture. This includes a particular economy of expression that favours lists and tables, and the role of the astronomer–astrologer scribes (*ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil* 'scribe of the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*' (on which see below); Rochberg 2000) whose investigations were originally motivated by the desire to foretell the future on the basis of heavenly signs. Seemingly related to the goal of astrological prognostication was the development of mathematical models to predict horizon phenomena of the planets—the dates and

[1] Ephemeris, plural ephemerides: a table of values that gives positions, dates, or other relevant quantities for the moon and five naked-eye planets in the sky at a given time or longitude.

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positions of risings and settings of celestial bodies, which were already of interest to diviners long before there was a reliable means of predicting such phenomena. Astronomical prediction was a prerequisite for horoscopy, but the Babylonian lunar and planetary tables (ephemerides) do not seem to have been aimed at horoscopes, at least not directly. The combined evidence for the astral sciences in Mesopotamia does not suggest that a significant difference in world-view or 'mentality' emerges with the astronomical researches in the period after *c.* 500 BC, though clearly a more finely tuned quantitative kind of astronomical investigation is characteristic of astronomical texts of the second half of the first millennium, setting these texts off from the tradition of celestial divination and its accompanying astronomy. This is, for example, reflected in the compilation MUL.APIN, which details information on sixty-six stars and constellations: while it stands in the tradition of earlier star catalogues, much of the data is based on new and more accurate observation. A continuity in the cultural framework for these scribal activities is evident in the continued interest in ominous phenomena and in the use of mathematical modelling, already seen in earlier texts: the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*, for example, which was compiled in the later second millennium BC on the basis of older material, provides in Tablet 14 a basic mathematical scheme for predicting the moon's visibility. In this light, the observation of celestial phenomena and the motives for such observation are parts of a single but complex tradition that begins with celestial divination. These deeper roots of Western astronomy should be taken into account in any big-picture synthesis.

Observation and knowledge, especially accompanied by systematization and reasoning, each of which are exhibited by the cuneiform texts that deal with signs, both terrestrial and celestial, as well as the Astronomical Diaries and ephemeris texts, are processes closely associated with the activity of science. Observation long figured prominently in assumptions concerning the foundations of scientific epistemology, specifically, as Alan Chalmers (1982: 22) put it, 'that *science starts with observation* . . . [and] that *observation yields a secure basis* from which knowledge can be derived' (his emphasis). But it is the second of the two propositions, that concerning the 'secure basis', which has been a matter of philosophical concern since at least the 2nd century AD when Sextus Empiricus wrote his treatise *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Mates 1996). On one hand, what is observed (seen) can be claimed to have a direct and unfiltered physical relation to the world existing apart from our perception of it, being the result of the interaction of light with the optic nerve and our brain. On the other hand, if observation is a matter of sense data and perception it is not at all clear that all observers observe (see) the same things. The identification and interpretation of what is seen is conditioned by other factors besides the interplay of light and human physiology. This fact has qualified such ideas about the bedrock of observation as a method of science and observational data as its foundation.

It is widely conceded that the influence of 'theory' is at work in the very act of observation, determining what one 'sees'. Such influence can take the form of a world-view or a culturally constructed classification of knowledge, or of a specific understanding of the way a phenomenon behaves, or an idea that motivates an observational programme. Observations, particularly those which have been subject to some kind of organized presentation—that is, brought within a systematic whole of some kind and meant for

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collective use—embody and depend upon theoretical orientations to data within which the observations are believed to 'fit.' To quote Alan Chalmers again (1982: 29), 'observation statements, then, are always made in the language of some theory and will be as precise as the theoretical or conceptual framework that they utilize is precise'. The importance of this argument is that theories or concepts about what things are, or the way they behave, are not simply the result of an accumulation of raw observational experience. Rather, observations themselves presuppose certain concepts. Theory, or a certain conceptual orientation to some body of phenomena, therefore precedes observation of those phenomena. Science, therefore, is the product of a complex relationship between observation and theory, one in which the two are interdependent.

In light of the idea of the interdependence of observation and theory, the notion of an observation-statement is of some use for approaching the two principal bodies of cuneiform sources that relate to the observation of phenomena in Mesopotamian antiquity. An observation-statement, as coined by Otto Neurath (1971), is a statement about some observable object, distinguished by that statement's being assayable, that is, analysable or subject to evaluation, either qualitative or quantitative. That is, an observation-statement is one offered for public assessment and stands in some relation to a larger conceptual framework. In Neurath's words (1971: 5), 'instead of saying "we compare the hypothesis with the facts," I suggest we say, "we compare the statements brought forward by the hypothesis with observation-statements."' Thus, observation-statements reflect the conceptual system that gives rise to them.

If observation-statements are to be identified in cuneiform texts, it seems to me that two corpora are representative, those in the reports of Neo-Assyrian scholars to their kings, accompanied by citations of omens from the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*, and those in the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries. Although the phenomena at the basis of omens are frequently stated as 'observed' ('it was seen': *innamir*), the 'if' statements (protases, singular protasis) of the omens do not report observation-statements. In contrast to the observations given in the scholars' reports, the hypothetical nature of omens puts these statements at a remove from any actual observations, and the nature of many phenomena in the protases suggests that neither were they themselves based exclusively upon observations. In the reports of the Neo-Assyrian scholars, however, true observation-statements are given, and they are in fact dependent on and determined by the conceptual framework established by the omen texts. So, while omens themselves do not represent observation-statements, they stand in direct relation to observation-statements preserved in the scholars' reports and letters to the kings.

The Astronomical Diaries archive began in the 8th century and continued to the 1st century BC, with extant texts from the 7th century on, making this Babylonian observation programme of longer duration even than all of modern science. Alan Chalmers's claim (1982: 29), that 'observation statements . . . are always made in the language of some theory', raises the question of what the theoretical framework for the Diaries archive was. This body of observational data has been shown to have contributed to a number of different astronomical and astrological goals, converging on the development and refinement of astronomical prediction. Clear intertextual relations between the Diaries

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and other astronomical and astrological texts, such as goal-year texts (records of astronomical data of the past, up to a certain 'goal-year'; ed. Hunger 2006), almanacs (texts containing predicted astronomical data for a coming year), and the horoscopes, make clear the use of the Diaries by the scribes for astronomical and astrological purposes

What then can be said about the theoretical framework for the Diaries? Given the interrelationships between the 'regular watch' (*naṣāru ša ginê*) at Babylon and other astronomical and astrological practice, that framework must have encompassed a variety of interests. Furthermore, given the exceedingly long duration of this archive, it is also possible, if not probable, that its own agenda underwent a certain development over time. One need only compare the earliest extant Diary, from 651 BC, with those from later centuries to see that there is a significant development. We will continue our discussion of the observations in the Diaries and their relationships to earlier (astrological) observation-statements as well as to the predictive astronomy of the Seleucid period below.

To summarize: the two principal bodies of sources for our reconstruction of the kinds of objects and phenomena subject to systematic observation in ancient Mesopotamia are: firstly, omen texts—that is, the corpus of divination from signs (celestial, medical, dream, terrestrial, physiognomic, and entrail (extispicy) omens) with their commentaries, including comments in Neo-Assyrian letters and reports; and secondly, astronomical observations in the shape of the Babylonian Diaries and related texts. These represent two different but interrelated kinds of observational programmes, encompassing different (but interrelated) subjects and designed for different (but interrelated) aims. Each produced different kinds of observation-statements.

In what follows, the first subject to be taken up in detail is the observation of ominous celestial phenomena and the reports of ominous phenomena—namely, the observation-statements that stand in relation to the omen divination programme. The second subject is the astronomical observations of the Babylonian Diaries with an eye to their relationships and the formation of the empirical foundation of mathematical astronomy.

Observation of ominous phenomena

Given the inclusion of diviners already in the lexical list Lu, a compilation of professional titles dating to the Early Dynastic period of the early to mid-third millennium BC (Falkenstein 1966), divination of some sort seems to have been present in ancient Mesopotamia from earliest times, very likely far predating any written reference to it: it is a continuous and characteristic cultural expression of the human desire to communicate with the divine across all periods in which cuneiform texts are preserved. The inscriptions of the Early Dynastic ruler Ur-Nanše of Lagaš also mention divination, in connection with selecting a 'spouse' for a god and with building a temple (Frayne 2008: 103–104 no. 17, 117–118 no. 32; cf. Falkenstein 1966: 47). The inscription of a later third-millennium ruler of Lagaš, Gudea, places divination in the context of a temple-building ritual (Koch-Westenholz 1995: 21–22) and confirms an acquaintance with

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divination on the basis of sheep entrails (extispicy), of dreams, and even of celestial signs (Edzard 1997: Cylinder A xiii 16–17, xx 5; i 17–18, 27; B viii 19–ix 9, xii 11). Moving on to the turn of the third to the second millennium BC, the administrative documentation of the Ur III period (on which see Brunke in this volume) contains ample references to cultic functionaries associated with divination and dream incubation (Falkenstein 1966), and also the contemporary Sumerian literature attests to the association of divination and cult (Oppenheim et al. 1965: 125, *s.v. bâru* discussion section).

But written collections of ominous signs and their portents are attested only in Akkadian, the earliest examples being Old Babylonian: extispicy omens, physiognomic omens, celestial omens (consisting mainly of lunar eclipses), and terrestrial omens (including material later collected in the birth-defect omen series *Šumma Izbu* 'If an anomaly' and the more general terrestrial omen series *Šumma Ālu* 'If a city'; see below and Koch in this volume). The bulk of extant omen texts, however, come from the 7th-century library of king Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c*. 630 BC) at Nineveh. The omen collections, or 'canonical' series (*iškaru*), despite their various content, are unified in form. In these collections, omens are expressed as conditionals 'If P then Q,' relating a sign to a portent. It is an interpretative challenge for modern scholars to penetrate below the surface level of the translations of omens to how the ancients thought P and Q were related, hence to the level of the ancient 'theory' of divination. And in terms of the above stated relationship of observation to theory, it seems to me worthwhile to attempt such an understanding of these theoretical underpinnings as they are inseparable from the observational aspect of Mesopotamian divination.

We are fortunate to have a rich body of evidence for the phenomena deemed signs (omens) in ancient Mesopotamia. In contrast, comparatively few collections of signs from the Greek and Graeco-Roman worlds are extant, such as the fragments of the 1st-century BC Roman scholar Nigidius Figulus, and the better-preserved works such as the treatise *De ostentis* (ed. Domenici 2007) of the 6th-century AD antiquarian John the Lydian are late. Much discussion, however, was produced (some of which does not survive except in titles of lost works) to explicate the relation between signs and what they signified, including but not limited to omens and portents. Some of this discussion was attributed to Stoic philosophers, who were specifically interested in conditionals (Allen 2001): the already mentioned 2nd-century AD philosopher Sextus Empiricus, for example, gives the Stoic definition of a sign in his treatise *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (2.104) as 'a proposition antecedent in a sound conditional and revelatory of the consequent', a definition on which a Babylonian scribe might have conceivably agreed.

The 'If P then Q' statements in cuneiform omen texts express the expectation of something (the consequent or apodosis) on the condition of something else (the antecedent or protasis). Babylonian omens constitute sound conditionals and the relation between antecedent and consequent does not violate propositional logical rules, but is independent of any semantic, causal, or empirical connection there may (or may not) be between the statements P and Q brought together as an omen (Rochberg 2009).

A separate question is, however, what *is* the connection between P and Q in Babylonian omens? Based on the evidence of the omens themselves, the likelihood of an empirical

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connection between antecedent and consequent in cuneiform omens is remote. In many cases the antecedent and consequent are linked by a phonetic or semantic relation between a word in the protasis and one in the apodosis, particularly in the form of various analogies that connect elements of the sign and its portent in a variety of ways (e.g., visual, conceptual). For example, from the series of extispicy omens (*bārûtu*): 'If the coils of the intestine look like the face of Huwawa (written logographically ^{d}HUM.HUM): it is the omen of the usurper king (Akkadian *hammā'u*) who ruled all the lands' (Clay 1917: no. 13, rev. 65). Here the antecedent is related to the consequent by a wordplay based on the phonetic echo of HUM.HUM in *hammā'u*, not by any empirical connection between intestines coiled that way and a usurpation. Another example can be found in an Old Babylonian collection of birth-defect omens: 'If the anomaly has the face of a lion, there will be a harsh king and he will weaken that country', where *nēšu* 'lion' and *enēšu* 'to weaken' provide the link (Leichty 1970: 202 no. 11). Such relations of sound attraction between words in the antecedent and consequent are found throughout the omen series, and the attraction of meaning, rather than sound, is attested, too, as in this planetary omen: 'If Jupiter becomes steady in the morning: enemy kings will be reconciled' (Reiner and Pingree 2005: 40, l. 1). Here Jupiter's steadiness is connected to reconciliation between enemy rulers on the basis of an analogy drawn between the protasis and the apodosis. The planet Jupiter, related to the god Marduk, connotes rulership, and its 'steadiness' (expressed with the verb *kânu*), connotes rectitude and stability; together they connote peace between enemy kings. Another even more self-evident example, again, from the Old Babylonian collection of birth-defect omens, has 'If the anomaly has no bladder: the flood in the river will be cut off, the rain in the sky will be scarce' (Leichty 1970: 202 no. 10). As these examples suggest, meaning on the levels of the conceptual and the philological is the essence of the connection between antecedent and consequent. Therefore, in order to penetrate beyond the surface level of the translation of 'If P then Q' statements in the texts to arrive at some understanding of the ancients' idea of what an omen was and how it signified, it seems necessary to give up the idea of an original empirical connection between the sign and its portent.

Ominous celestial phenomena

The already mentioned celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil* consists of four sections devoted to celestial signs. Three pertain to the principal celestial bodies: lunar omens, solar omens, and planetary and fixed-stars omens. A fourth is for meteorological signs (Gehlken 2003), on a par with signs from celestial bodies, all of which were viewed as occurring 'in heaven' (*ina šamê*). The lunar omens, produced by the moon-god Sin, fall into two parts, the appearance of the moon in its first crescent (Tablets 1–13, termed 'visibilities of the moon'; ed. Verderame 2002) and when full and in eclipse (Tablets 15–22; ed. Rochberg-Halton 1988). These omens describe the configuration of the crescent (the 'horns'), conjunctions of the moon with fixed stars (the ecliptical stars 'in the path of the

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moon'), dates of opposition (when 'the gods see one another'—that is, on either side of the horizon), and the dates and characteristics of the eclipsed moon (e.g. reddish colour, direction of the shadow). The moon during an eclipse—that is, at its syzygies[2]—was clearly of paramount importance, a feature that continues in cuneiform horoscopes (Rochberg 1998; 2003). The days of the months also carried ominous significance in accordance with a tradition that established lucky and unlucky days of the month together with proscriptions and rituals to be followed on those days.

The sections on solar omens in *Enūma Anu Enlil* were similarly divided into two principal parts, the first dealing predominantly with the sun at sunrise (Tablets 23–29, ed. Soldt 1995) and the second with eclipses (Tablets 31/32–35/36). Attention to the dates of sunrise, cloud formations, parhelia (also called 'sun dogs': haloes or patches of light around the sun), and the proximity of the sun to other celestial bodies is characteristic of the first part of the section on the omens produced by the sun-god Šamaš. For example:

> If the sun is red like a torch when it becomes visible on the first day of the month of Nisannu (March/April, the first month of the Mesopotamian year), and a white cloud moves about in front of it, variant: stands at its side, and the east wind blows: in Nisannu the east wind will blow and in that month, on the 28th, 29th or 30th day, an eclipse of the sun will take place and during that eclipse [...], variant: in that month the king will die and his son will seize the throne, and the land [..., variant:] the land will be happy, the sky will [...] its rains, (and) the earth its produce in the proper season. (Soldt 1995: 5)

This is followed by an omen for the sun being yellow at rising on the 1st of Nisannu. Omens for the sun's rising on the first day of other months are given, including whether it appears in a cloud, or whether one of the four winds blows during the event. Omens for the presence of various stars and up to eight parhelia at the rising of the solar disc are given. For instance:

> If a normal disk (i.e., the sun) is present and one disk (i.e. a 'sun dog') stands to the right (and) one to the left: If the king treats the city and his people kindly for reconciliation and they become reconciled, the cities will start vying with each other, city walls will be destroyed, the people will be dispersed. (Soldt 1995: 29)

While the bulk of the first section of solar omens deal with the sun's rising, there are also some for the sun's setting, including setting in proximity to other celestial bodies (e.g. moon, Jupiter) and constellations (e.g. Centaurus, Scorpius, the Wagon constellation).

The third section of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, on planetary omens (ed. Reiner and Pingree 1975; 1981; 1998; 2005), is interested in the conjunction of planets with fixed stars, some synodic phenomena,[3] especially the risings and settings of Venus, and various optical phenomena such as brightness, dimness, and colours. The positions of planets relative

[2] Syzygy: the alignment of moon, sun, and the observer on earth such that the moon is seen either at conjunction or opposition with the sun.

[3] Synodic phenomena: cyclical appearances of the moon or planets due to their relative positions with respect to the sun; e.g., first visibilities, last visibilities, oppositions.

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to the moon, or to the horns of the crescent moon, fixed stars, and each other figure prominently, with indications of the planet being in front of, behind, to the right and left, and to the upper/lower right/left. Also prominent are the dates of appearances (themselves of ominous importance relative to lucky/unlucky calendar days, as already mentioned), and times relative to sunrise and sunset. Many periodic elements of planetary and also lunar phenomena were built into the omens, though these were not of predominant interest.

Despite the fact that some ominous celestial phenomena included in these omens cannot occur and therefore will not be observable, all of the celestial omens are given as though equally viable. This is paralleled in the terrestrial signs, some of which are difficult to imagine as observable. Even expressed with the verb 'to see' (*amāru*), some signs refer to phenomena that seem highly questionable from our point of view. Within the first twenty-one tablets of the terrestrial omen series *Šumma Ālu* (ed. Freedman 1998), for example, are omens from the sight of a corpse like a living person, the appearance of various kinds of demons, as well as the footprint of a demon, all said to be 'seen'. The celestial phenomena compiled in *Enūma Anu Enlil*, too, exhibit a range of phenomena on a continuum from the normal to the abnormal and finally the unobservable.

But if there is a sense that signs are seen, how is the inclusion in these texts of unobservable phenomena to be explained? An important element of the structure of the antecedents ('If P' section) of all types of omen texts is the use of thematic schemata based on binaries such as up and down, right and left, symmetries such as the four directions, and other standard sequences such as the five colours black, white, green, red, and gold (cf. Sallaberger 2000: 245–251). Schematic substitutions required for the completion of the schemata result in the construction of some signs that do not refer to anything actual and will not occur. Examples of such 'impossible' phenomena are the appearance of the sun at midnight or the lunar eclipse shadow that travels from west to east across the lunar disc. Indeed, most of the extant Jupiter omens of *Enūma Anu Enlil* have the planet 'entering', 'passing', 'coming close to', or 'being in the middle of' fixed stars whose latitudes with respect to Jupiter's path prevent this from ever occurring. In fact, as David Pingree pointed out (Reiner and Pingree 2005: 28), 'this choice of constellations far removed from the path of Jupiter seems to be deliberate', because when the planet is north of the equator (between the spring and fall equinoxes) the constellations it is associated with in these omens are to the south and vice versa.

This presents a puzzle to our way of thinking because if we know that P cannot occur we wonder what purpose statements beginning 'If P' serve. If we know, for example, that Venus can never be seen at the zenith, a statement beginning 'If Venus is seen at the zenith' to us seems pointless and wrong. We might think phenomena such as Venus appearing in the zenith or the sun appearing at midnight were conceived of within the omen list as possibilities because the scribes did not know that such phenomena cannot occur. But this is hardly the case. What of the eclipse omens for days of the month when eclipses do not occur? The Babylonians' perspicacity in matters of periodicity is attested in the early ability to predict eclipses (Steele 2000). We therefore hesitate to say that the scribes were unaware of the impossibility of a solar eclipse, say, on the 10th day of the

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month, or a lunar eclipse on the 20th. The high degree of the scribes' understanding of the behaviour of the phenomena suggests that such phenomena as had never been observed were included not because they were thought to be usual or likely occurrences, but because they represented the limits of the conceivable, within the framework of ominous schemata. The schematic treatment of the ominous phenomena created room for expansion into the realm not of the empirical but the conceivable, which does not always map neatly onto the actual, and 'possible' does not necessarily refer solely to physical actuality. It is clear that the links between the elements of antecedent and consequent were formed on the basis of a variety of semantic, phonetic, or even graphic relationships, in what can only be described as philological, not empirical connections. If what is at stake in the omen lists is not the actual occurrence of a sign but whether it is paired with a consequent in such a way as to constitute 'a sound conditional' and be 'revelatory of the consequent', in the event that such an unlikely thing might occur, then sense can be made of the inclusion of non-occurring, yet conceivable, phenomena. Omen texts construct phenomena out of various conceptions of how variation is possible. The aim is to organize phenomena around conceptions of their schematic variation. And since perception and conception clearly differ with respect to actual events in the world, and observation has a more direct relation to the external phenomenal world ('observed reality'), the reports of Neo-Assyrian scholars to their kings and the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries, unlike omen texts, are engaged with 'observed realities' as they record what is seen, and in the case of the Diaries, also what is measured or calculated. Omens, however, being abstract and hypothetical, do not represent observation-statements.

Reports of ominous phenomena

As we have seen, celestial omens are preserved in list form in the scholarly compilation *Enūma Anu Enlil*, but they are also quoted extensively in reports written by scholars employed by the Assyrian royal court during the reigns of Esarhaddon (682–669 BC) and into the early years of Assurbanipal (668–*c.* 630 BC). Originating from cities such as Assur, Babylon, Nippur, Uruk, Dilbat, Cutha, and Borsippa, the reports were written, at least during the period covered by the surviving sources, very soon after the observations were made and transported with alacrity to Nineveh, and in some cases ritual measures were taken to avoid bad portents. These reports contain actual, sometimes datable observations of the same ominous phenomena as are found in *Enūma Anu Enlil*. A given report focuses usually on one or two phenomena that have been seen and records these together with the relevant omens. The distinction between actual observations and cited omens also shows in the use of two different forms of the Akkadian language, the former in either Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian, the northern and southern dialects spoken at the time, the latter in the 'Standard Babylonian' of first-millennium scholarly and literary texts.

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A reported observation is stated as in the following last visibility of Venus as an evening star: 'Venus set in the west.' Thereupon the report continues with the citation of omens from the series, for instance:

> If Venus in the month of Ṭebetu (December/January; the tenth month of the Babylonian calendar) from the 1st to the 30th day disappears in the west: the harvest of the land will prosper. If Venus keeps a stable position: the days of the ruler will be long; there will be truth in the land. If Venus moves in the path of Ea and stands: the gods will have peace for the Westland. (Hunger 1992: no. 5)

Of the three omens quoted in this report, only the first corresponds directly to the observation of Venus' last visibility, but for the interpretation of the sign other elements were taken into account, as for example what 'path' (a qualitative expression of what we would call declination) the planet was in, reflected in the third of the omens cited. The significance of the observed phenomenon was assessed on the basis of the portents selected from the series; in this case they were all good. In another report (Hunger 1992: no. 66, rev. 3–4), a lunar omen is quoted about 'the sting of Scorpius' surrounding the moon like a halo, with an actual observation that 'this night, a halo surrounded the moon, all of Scorpius stood inside it.' Or, to give another example (Hunger 1992: no. 74, 1–4), an omen which says: 'If the Goat star produces a luminous phenomenon (*mišhu*): the gods will forgive the land, they will have mercy on the land,' is quoted with the observation 'This night it produced a luminous phenomenon.'

The idea that only visible phenomena are portentous comes across in the following report:

> Twice or thrice we watched for Mars today (but) we did not see (it); it has set. Maybe the king my lord will say as follows: 'is there any (ominous) sign in (the fact) that it set?' (I answer): 'There is not.' (Hunger 1992: no. 7, 5-rev. 5)

The observation of the celestial bodies in the reports is clearly in order that their meaning as signs will be revealed through citation and evaluation (Akkadian *pišru*) of the relevant omens from *Enūma Anu Enlil*. Getting the observation right was of obvious importance, as the following report from the scholar Balasi shows:

> Concerning Mercury, about which the king my lord wrote to me: yesterday Issar-šumu-ereš had an argument with Nabu-ahhe-eriba in the palace. Later, at night, they went and all made observations; they saw (it) and were satisfied. (Hunger 1992: no. 83, 4-rev. 3)

These passages illustrate the assayable nature of the observation-statements in the reports. They were evaluated both qualitatively and quantitatively, both for the purpose of determining their portents and for predicting some ominous phenomena that were known to be periodic.

The dates of phenomena are of importance to the writers of the reports, particularly concerning the dates of the lunar syzygies (see note 2 above), as in this report concerning opposition: 'We kept watch on the 13th and the 14th day; on the 15th day the moon and sun saw each other' (Hunger 1992: no. 137, 1–4). It may also be indicative of the

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concern for which days of the month phenomena occurred that the commentary text *Šumma Sin ina Tāmartīšu* ('If the moon at its appearance') clarifies expressions such as 'not at its appointed time' or 'not at the right time' with days of the month (Koch 1999: 151, 154). Finally, in so far as the cited omens give the dates of phenomena, the reports are also concerned with dates. Whether the ominous significance of such dates was a factor, as it was in the cuneiform tradition of hemerologies (calendars of auspicious and inauspicious days; Livingstone 1993; 1998; 2007) and still was in the later classical worlds of Greece and Rome (Grafton and Swerdlow 1988), however, is not directly apparent.

Astronomical observations

Collections of celestial phenomena, including weather observations, together with events of political and economic life are found not only in the omens of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, but also in the form of the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries (Sachs and Hunger 1988; 1989; 1996). Although the earliest extant Diary is from the mid-7th century, several indications point to the 8th-century inception of this archive, which means that the systematic nightly watches and recording of celestial observations of the early Diaries would have been contemporary with, but independent from, those represented by the already discussed reports of Neo-Assyrian scholars. One external indication of an 8th-century inception comes from Ptolemy's *Almagest*, mentioned earlier, where the 'Nabonassar Era', named for king Nabonassar (Nabu-naṣir) of Babylon (r. 747–734 BC), is an epoch by which Babylonian data are dated. This era was not used in contemporary Babylonian texts, but cuneiform eclipse reports, on the other hand, begin in 747 BC (Hunger 2002: no. 1), the accession year of Nabonassar. A compilation of observed eclipses preserves an eclipse observation as early as 731 BC and, as Brack-Bernsen and Steele (2005: 182) have noted, from the structure of this compilation it is likely that it, too, began in 747 BC. The further likelihood, then, is that Diaries, with their reports of observed eclipses, were available in this early period as a source of data.

The association of the reign of Nabonassar with the beginnings of certain new practices in cuneiform scribal activity (see also De Breucker in this volume) is also seen in the Babylonian Chronicle series, which begins with Nabonassar and ends in the 3rd century BC, making it of comparable duration with the Diaries as well. Interestingly, the earliest preserved Diary, from the year 652 BC, makes mention of the same military engagement of the 16th year of Šamaš-sumu-ukin as the relevant text in the Chronicle series, namely the encounter between Assyrian and Babylonian troops on the 27th day of the month Addaru (February/March, the twelfth month of the Mesopotamian calendar) in a place called Hiritu, at which the Babylonian army was heavily defeated and withdrew from the area (Sachs and Hunger 1988: 47; Grayson 1975: 132). Chronicles and Diaries have similar interests in things of a political, military, and religious nature. In the political realm, Chronicles mention royal accessions and assassination, rebellions, and strained Assyro-Babylonian relations, while the Diaries record administrative activities

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in regions outside Babylonia, such as Susa, Bactria, or Sardis. The military matters mentioned in the Chronicles are such events as battles, plundering, massacres, and the capturing of cities. The Diaries also make mention of the movement and fighting of troops. Religious events treated in the Chronicles are sacrifices, the interruption of the New Year Festival, and things to do with divine statues. The Diaries, similarly, mention divine statues and divine accoutrements, as well as the conducting of divine rites and sacrifices, clearing debris from the temple Esangila, Marduk's shrine in Babylon, and the performance of the kettle-drum ritual.

The combination in the Diaries of astronomical data with political and social events not only establishes some kind of connection to chronicle writing but is thematically reminiscent of the celestial omen literature of *Enūma Anu Enlil* as well. Another topic frequently found in omen apodoses and in the Diaries is disease. Omen apodoses contain many references to disease and pestilence and the noting of the presence of disease continues in the Diary archive—for instance, there are mentions of 'coughing and a little *rišūtu*-disease' and 'much *ekketu*-disease' (Sachs and Hunger 1988: Diary -567, 7; Diary -273, 33'&). In this context it is important to refer to the late Babylonian development of iatromathematics, or medical astrology, with texts associating various diseases with signs of the zodiac (Reiner 2000; Scurlock 2004). The recording of outbreaks of disease in the Diaries may suggest an underlying assumption about the periodic recurrence of diseases that could potentially be determinable through meticulous preservation of their occurrence in dated archives.

An interest in wild animals within city limits is apparent in both Diaries and Chronicles (Grayson 1975: Chronicle 17 mentioning a wolf, a badger, a panther, and a deer; Sachs and Hunger 1988: Diary –567, 7, rev. 21 mentioning a fox and a wolf) and is also typical of omen apodoses, as is the necessity to sell children in times of famine (e.g. Sachs and Hunger 1988: Diary -373, upper edge 1). While a strong thematic connection between the Diaries and the omens is thus clear, the reason for it in any practical sense is only to be inferred. The use of celestial divination after the Neo-Assyrian period is not attested at Babylonian, Persian, or Macedonian royal courts, but omen series were preserved and copied by scribes until late in the Hellenistic period, suggesting that omen divination was a live subject, at least among the cuneiform literati. In the absence of evidence for the use of omens, it is difficult to say exactly why the omen texts continued to be copied. It is, however, noteworthy that the professional title for scribes who dealt with astronomy and astrology was *ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil* 'scribe of the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*'; Rochberg 2000), although it does not appear in the extant Diary texts.

In summarizing the contents of the Diaries, Noel Swerdlow (1998: 22–23) said:

> Considering their entire contents it appears that the Diaries were intended as an empirical, scientific record of ominous celestial phenomena, both astronomical and meteorological, including detailed records of the weather, ominous events on the earth, and the fortunes, primarily political, military, and agricultural, of kingdoms, with the object of investigating whatever correlations could be found and reducing the interpretation of omens to an empirical science, and even to something

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> approaching an exact science . . . I can see no other reason for consistently gathering these apparently disparate observations and reports into a single continuous record for more than six hundred years than just such correlations.

However difficult it might be to reconstruct a non-divinatory purpose for compiling these particular categories of subjects within the space of an Astronomical Diary, it is equally, if not more difficult to find evidence that the ongoing observations recorded in these texts were actually used for divination. Nonetheless, as Swerdlow suggests, the Diaries were immersed in, or at least emerged from, a culture of observing ominous celestial phenomena and these phenomena were recorded in the Diaries together with mundane events of political, military, and economic nature. Another indication that interrelations between celestial, meteorological, and worldly phenomena were assumed and increasingly investigated comes from a late collection of procedures for predicting not only astronomical, but also astrological and meteorological subjects (Brack-Bernsen and Hunger 2002).

A number of correspondences can be found in phenomena observed in Diaries and in *Enūma Anu Enlil*. Prominent in the lunar omens are various features of the first visibility of the moon, including 'earthshine' ('he wears a corona'), which is also mentioned in the Diaries. Other ominous lunar phenomena include haloes, eclipses, and eclipses together with meteors, and especially the descriptions of eclipses feature also in the Diaries. Also predominant in the Diaries is the description of the moon's position each night of the month, given in cubits above or below, in front of or behind certain fixed stars on the ecliptic.[4] Omens also include some conjunctions of the moon with fixed stars, though using a different set of stars (the so-called 'stars in the path of the moon') from those used in the Diaries (the so-called 'normal stars'). Some solar phenomena observed in the Diaries duplicate *Enūma Anu Enlil* omens, too: the Diaries occasionally report the sun's rising or setting 'in a box' (some kind of cloud formation), which also occurs in the solar omens of *Enūma Anu Enlil* (Roth et al. 2005: 439 *s.v. pitnu* A, meaning 3). The Diaries observe planets passing by the fixed stars, and conjunctions of planets with fixed stars are found in *Enūma Anu Enlil*'s planetary omen section—for example, Jupiter and Mars 'approaching' or 'reaching' various fixed stars (Reiner and Pingree 1981: Tablet 50–51 III 8a, b, III 9a, IV 4b)—while the Venus omens (Reiner and Pingree 1998) include the planet 'reaching' and 'passing by' stars, such as 'If Venus reaches the Pleiades', or 'If Venus stands at the Pleiades for two days and passes (them)'. Numerous cloud conditions and bad weather such as thunder and lightning, rains and winds, fog, mist, and hail are mentioned in the Diaries, and *Enūma Anu Enlil* contains a wealth of weather omens in a section devoted to atmospheric phenomena (Gehlken 2003). Compare this Diary entry: '(At sunset) lightning flashed continuously in the north, it thundered once' (Sachs and Hunger 1988, -308, l. 16) with the omens such as: 'If Adad produces thunder and lightning' or 'If Adad thunders and white (flashes of) lightning flare up' (Virolleaud 1905–12:

[4] Ecliptic: the apparent path that the sun traces out in the sky during the year, appearing to move eastwards relative to the fixed stars.

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Adad 19, l. 49; 6, l. 5). These occurrences, like the appearances of the celestial bodies, were considered ominous, though it seems that the principal reason for mentioning clouds and bad weather in the Diaries was because observation could not be carried out. In this case, lunar visibility phenomena surrounding first visibility and opposition of the moon were calculated.

A Diary normally collected observed, and occasionally calculated, data for six (or sometimes seven) months of the year. Phenomena were observed in accordance with a selective programme, focusing on the positions of the planets and of the moon, and the duration of its visibilities around syzygy (see note 2 above), on designated dates. As already said, not every item recorded in a Diary can be correlated with an omen, though this lack of specific correspondences does not necessarily argue against the idea that phenomena, in general, were still regarded as ominous throughout the period of Diary writing. Of equal if not greater importance, however, is that the observational programme established in the Diaries had specific astronomical use, completely unrelated to celestial or other divination, as indicated by other astronomical text genres clearly derived from them—for example, eclipse reports and the already mentioned goal-year texts, to take two very different text types. This might, however, be said to be somewhat question-begging of the purpose of these derived astronomical texts.

From the point of view of the history of astronomy, the dated observations of phenomena compiled in the Diaries have proved useful for understanding the formation of late Babylonian mathematical astronomy, especially the lunar theory, as preserved in the corpus of ephemeris tables (see note 1 above). Observation, and calculation, of the intervals of lunar visibility around syzygy were instrumental in the development of the periods and period relations that underpin the mathematical structures of the predictive lunar table texts. An example of the use of Diaries for prediction and the formulation of quantitative predictive methods is found in the so-called goal-year texts, which predict for the 'goal year' the set of phenomena collected in the Diaries (Brack-Bernsen and Hunger 2008; Brack-Bernsen and Steele 2005). Planetary phenomena are also predicted: for instance, synodic phenomena (see note 3 above) such as first and last visibilities and first and second stationary points for Jupiter (71 years to bring a return to the date, 83 years to bring a return to longitude), Venus (8 years), Mercury (46 years), Saturn (59 years), and Mars (47 years to bring a return to longitude and 79 years to bring a return to the date), and the returns of planets to certain positions with respect to ecliptical stars (see note 4 above). These are projections of dates of occurrences of such phenomena on the basis of periods that bring a planet back not only to a certain synodic appearance, but also to its location in the sky (or close to it) and a date in the Babylonian calendar (correcting for intercalary years). The predictions are in the form of lunar and planetary data culled from the Diaries the requisite number of years before the 'goal year' that will bring such returns.

Given the overwhelming evidence of the use of Diaries for the prediction of lunar and planetary phenomena, as well as, possibly, the construction of new models for predictive astronomy, continuities from omen divination to the Diaries' programme do not seem to be of central relevance to the particular observational programme represented

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in these texts. That is, the image and purpose of celestial observation seems to have changed with the Diaries. In Daston and Galison's terms (2007: 69), the Diaries embody a new 'idea in the observation'. In the present context, this new idea had to do with the direction that Babylonian astronomy was taking during the period referred to by A.J. Sachs as 'intermediate astronomy' (Brack-Bernsen and Hunger 2008: 3, n. 2). This development seems to have been geared towards better prediction of the phenomena referred to above, especially lunar and planetary synodic phenomena, later tabulated in ephemerides (see note 1 above). The observations of positions of celestial bodies each night must have been made with an eye to this overarching programme, indeed was likely shaped by it, as suggested perhaps by the stark difference in content between the first extant Diary in the 7th century and the later ones. As such, the content of the Diaries represents the product of ideas (conceptions) and perception. If, as in the mathematical ephemerides, the prediction of the regular return of celestial bodies to certain celestial positions and/or certain dates was the principal objective, the Diaries' mode of investigating the phenomena provided the effective empirical foundation for the creation of a predictive astronomy. The reasons why the prediction of the phenomena was so highly desired is, however, still a matter for conjecture as the sources do not address this question directly. We may speculate that the prediction of the astronomical phenomena was intended to give diviners an advantage, but there is no evidence for active celestial omen interpretation after the 7th century BC. To find the rationale for the Diaries in celestial divination seems both an over-simplification and overly reductive. The other domain in which predicted planetary positions were necessary was horoscopy, but Diaries were being recorded for many centuries before the first horoscope is attested for the year 410 BC (Rochberg 1998: 51–55). These unanswerable questions underscore the complexity and the changing nature of the observation of celestial phenomena as evidenced in cuneiform sources over the course of their long history.

Conclusions

If science is viewed as the product of the desires of a particular community to know, understand, and sometimes predict physical phenomena (for whatever reason), it bears relation to the changing goals and standards of the social world that produced it as much as it does to the unchanging natural world. Cuneiform sources for the observation of celestial phenomena demonstrate this relationship in that the two principal bodies of observational texts, the Neo-Assyrian scholars' reports and the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries, are each focused on the phenomena of the moon and planets, but in fundamentally different ways. Categorical boundaries, therefore, of the social and the natural are on a certain level artificial, just as the idea of raw sense data is artificial (the minute we express what is seen, we introduce social standards, and aims). With reference to the Enlightenment philosopher David Hume, Daston and Galison (2007: 81) said that he 'contended that all perceptions, whether epistemological, moral, or aesthetic, came to be infused with judgement

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through reflection on accumulated experience.' Since the 18th century AD, therefore, the idea of the perception of physical things as coloured by ideas has been part of scientific epistemology. More recently, 20th-century philosophy of science questioned the very boundary between observation and theory. The exceedingly long record of the human interaction with the phenomenal world contained in cuneiform observational texts is evidence of just such an infusion of judgement on perception and the consequent interdependence of observation and theory. And over the long historical record of observation of phenomena in ancient Mesopotamia we are afforded a picture of the changing aims, interests, standards, and methods of cuneiform science.

Further reading

Koch (1995) and Rochberg (2004) are accessible introductions to Mesopotamian celestial divination and astronomy, while Rochberg (2000) discusses its practioners. Aaboe (1980) and Sachs (1974) deal with observational astronomy and its theory. Brown (2000) analyses astronomical practice and theory primarily on the basis of Neo-Assyrian sources. While Neugebauer (1955) remains a standard work on the astronomical cuneiform sources, the contributions to Swerdlow (1999) provide detailed discussions of ancient astronomy from the early second millennium BC to the 5th century AD.

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CHAPTER 30

BEROSSOS BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

GEERT DE BREUCKER

At the beginning of the Hellenistic period, in the final phase of cuneiform culture, a Babylonian scholar called Bel-re'ušunu composed a history of his country in Greek, meant for readers in the wider world beyond the community of traditional learning. It bears witness to the new Hellenistic context in which Babylonian culture found itself after the conquest of Alexander the Great in 331 BC. The Babylonian scholar Bel-re'ušunu became the Greek historian Berossos. This chapter is a case study in how Babylonian and Greek culture converged. It will show how Bel-re'ušunu/Berossos unified Babylonian historical traditions and Greek scholarship and how he transformed native traditions according to Greek forms and concepts. This chapter also aims to contribute to the study of Babylonian traditions in Berossos's time and hopes to reveal how a native Babylonian conceived the history of his culture at that period.

Bel-re'ušunu, better known under his Graecized name Berossos, was, as he himself writes, a contemporary of Alexander the Great (FGrH 680 T 1) and lived in Babylon. He was a 'priest' of Belos—that is, the city's patron god Bel/Marduk (FGrH 680 T 2)—which simply means that he had a connection to the Esangila, Bel's sanctuary and the main temple complex of Babylon. Van der Spek (2000: 439) speculates that he might be identical to the homonymous *šatammu* ('temple administrator', 'high priest') of Esangila who is attested in cuneiform tablets from the period 258–253 BC. But this identification is incompatible with Berossos' claim that he was a contemporary of Alexander the Great (r. 330–323 BC). He wrote his work during the reign of the Seleucid king Antiochos I (r. 281–261 BC), presumably towards the end of his life, and dedicated it to the king, though there is no reason to suppose that he was a member of the Seleucid court (so Burstein 1978: 5). It is said that Berossos later moved to the Greek island of Kos and

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founded a school of 'Chaldaean' learning there (FGrH 680 T 5a-b). However, this testimony represents a later, invented tradition (Kuhrt 1987: 43–44), which was linked to the astronomical–astrological lore falsely ascribed to Berossos, and we will return to this subject below.

Babylonian culture and society in Berossos' time

In Berossos' time cuneiform culture was no longer embedded in daily life but was confined to the realms of tradition, religion, and learning (Oelsner 1986; 2002a; 2002b; Spek 1998; Boiy 2004). It was fostered in the main cities of Babylonia by an urban elite that was connected to the temple (Clancier in this volume), for whom it represented the age-old high culture of Mesopotamia. The 'stream of tradition', to use Oppenheim's label (1977: 13), the corpus of 'canonical' works that had been transmitted for many centuries, continued to flow. Sumerian and Akkadian were still the languages of learning. Cuneiform script was written not only on clay tablets but also on wooden writing-boards and parchment (Clancier 2005: 90 n. 23; Frahm 2005; cf. Oelsner 2002b: 16; Westenholz 2007: 279 n. 19), but these media have not survived the Mesopotamian climate to the present day. Traditional scholarly compositions and compendia, some of them going back to the beginning of the second millennium, were carefully copied and studied, while new genres, such as mathematical astronomy and horoscopes, were created (Rochberg 2004). Rituals, hymns and prayers, and contracts dealing with temple prebends (see Waerzeggers in this volume) and the organization of offerings, attest to the continuity of traditional Babylonian religion and its cult practices (Spek 1992: 250–260; Linssen 2003; Boiy 2004). Temples were rebuilt and new sanctuaries founded in Babylon and Uruk (Oelsner 2002a: 186–188; Spek 2006).

Modern scholars' emphasis on the persistence of cuneiform culture, though justified, tends to underplay the fact that the cuneiform tradition was only one aspect of Babylonian culture in the Seleucid period. Aramaic was the most widely spoken language, even amongst the upholders of cuneiform culture. Some scholars hold that Akkadian was still spoken in the Hellenistic and Parthian periods (Streck 1995: xxiii–xxiv; Spek 1998: 255; Westenholz 2007: 292–293). If so, it had a status comparable to that of Latin in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance: spoken by scholars and clerics, but otherwise no longer a living language. Besides the traditional literature written in Sumerian and Akkadian, there must have been a Babylonian literature written in Aramaic. Since Aramaic was written on perishable material such as parchment and papyrus, this literature, which very likely expressed popular traditions and reflected cultural innovations, is almost completely lost, and only very few remains attest to the use of Aramaic in Babylonia (Clancier in this volume).

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With the advent of Graeco-Macedonian rule in 331 BC, the Greek language was introduced into Babylonian administration. But no Greek documents, which were also written on perishable media, have survived. In the Babylonian cities of Nippur and Uruk, inscribed bullae (lumps of clay attached to cords that were bound around a text roll), stamped with seal impressions, have been found (Gibson 1994: 97–98; Lindström 2003). The Greek inscriptions on them mention taxes and royal agents.

Other media for Greek texts are sparsely attested (see Oelsner 1986: 250–258; Boiy 2004: 39–43). Rare Greek loanwords in cuneiform texts are restricted to the titles of royal officials or Greek institutions. It is not known how widespread the use of Greek was in daily life. The so-called 'Graeco-Babyloniaca' texts attest to the use of the Greek alphabet by students, most probably native Babylonians, learning cuneiform script. These tablets, which originate from Babylon, contain school exercises in Sumerian and Akkadian written in cuneiform script on one side and transcribed into Greek letters on the other (Geller 1997; Westenholz 2007; Finkel and Seymour 2008: 89). The date of the tablets is uncertain but they probably belong to the period between 50 BC and 50 AD. Some scholars assume a widespread practice of writing Sumerian and Akkadian in Greek letters on papyrus or parchment (Oelsner 1986: 243–244; Geller 1997: 48–49), but this practice was apparently rather exceptional (Houston, Baines, and Cooper 2003: 455–456; Westenholz 2007: 278–279).

Babylonian society in Berossos' time did not just comprise native Babylonians and Greeks. Cuneiform texts—albeit mainly from the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods a few centuries earlier, such as the archives of the merchant family Murašu from Achaemenid Nippur (Jursa 2005: 113–114)—attest to the presence of Jews, Phoenicians, Arabs, Egyptians, Phrygians, Carians, Iranians, and Indians, amongst others (e.g. Zadok 1981; 2003; 2005; Waerzeggers 2006). Rather than being exceptional, the multi-ethnic picture that emerges from these texts is more representative of Babylonia than was once thought (Zadok 2003: 481).

The intensity of interactions between different ethnic groups and the degree of Babylonian acculturation amongst them are difficult to determine, however. It is rarely possible to recognize a non-Babylonian taking an Akkadian name, for instance. More research on this point is needed. However, it is very probable that contact between different ethnic groups eventually led to a certain degree of fusion, a symbiotic culture, in which Babylonian and non-Babylonian elements were no longer discernible. For instance, Berossos (FGrH 680 F 4a-b) and Genesis (7.11) both date the beginning of the Flood to the second month of the year, a date not found in the extant cuneiform sources. A Late Babylonian astronomical cuneiform text alludes to the existence of a seven-day week, as in Genesis (Scurlock and Al-Rawi 2006: 357–360), although this concept is already attested in Old Assyrian cuneiform texts of the early second millennium BC (Veenhof 1995–96). Instead of assuming Jewish influence on Babylonian culture or vice versa, we should consider it more likely that these similarities are attestations of a cultural tradition shared by Babylonians and Jews. This tradition is rarely attested explicitly in the cuneiform texts, which provide only one piece of the colourful mosaic that was Hellenistic Babylonian culture. The other pieces are, however, almost entirely lost.

The case of Berossos himself shows that there were close cultural contacts between Greeks and at least some Babylonians. We can only guess how Berossos became

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acquainted with Greek culture. As a contemporary of Alexander the Great he must have experienced the king's stays in Babylon in 331 and 323 BC together with his army and train of Greek scholars and artisans (Berve 1926: 65–80). Later, Babylon became a capital of the Seleucid empire, entailing the presence of a royal court, army, and administration. Even when Babylon lost this position to the new city of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (founded probably sometime before 301 BC) it remained an important regional city, where a Seleucid garrison and officials were stationed. Evidence for the presence of Greek culture in Babylon itself is scanty (Boiy 2004: 289–293), but this may not be indicative. The first building phase of the Greek theatre—a prime symbol of Hellenic city culture—excavated in Babylon possibly dates to the time of Berossos (Wetzel, Schmidt, and Mallwitz 1957: 19). Contacts between the Seleucid administration and the temple elite very likely contributed to the latter's adoption of Greek culture, at least to some degree. Too often an antithetical model of Hellenization—Babylonian versus Greek—is assumed. Yet case studies from Ptolemaic Egypt show that for (some) Egyptians, and even Greeks, there was no antithesis between native culture and Greek culture: individuals were versed in both and moved between them depending on the context (Clarysse 1985). The case of Berossos indicates that a similar process occurred in Babylonia. A reappraisal of the process of Hellenization in Babylonia would be desirable.

Babylonian scholars and historians

In Berossos' time scholarly life was organized and financed by the temple (De Breucker 2003b; Beaulieu 2006b: 17–23). In Babylon itself it was centred in and around the Esangila temple. Ration lists from Esangila's archive dating to the 4th century BC record rations for lamentation priests (*kalûs*), exorcists (*āšipus*), and astronomers (*ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil*), showing that they worked for and were paid by the temple (Boiy 2004: 267–269; Beaulieu 2006a; Jursa 2005: 73–75). Temples possessed libraries, such as that of the Reš temple in Uruk (Pedersén 1998: 209–211). Babylonian scholars could also keep tablet collections at home, as illustrated by the library of Iqiša, an exorcist and 'temple-enterer' of the Reš temple in early Hellenistic Uruk (Pedersén 1998: 212–213; Oelsner 2000: 797–798; Robson in this volume).

Scholarly activities were dominated by a few extended families. Knowledge and profession most usually passed from father to son. Families of scholars like the Mušezib clan from Babylon can be followed over several generations (Oelsner 2000: 802–811). A tendency to keep knowledge inside the circle of experts is discernible (Rochberg 2004: 212–219). Cuneiform as well as classical sources indicate that several Babylonian cities had their own scholarly traditions, and allude to rivalry between them (Finkel 2000: 141; Frame and George 2005: 265–270; Strabo, 16.1.6; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 6.123).

Although we may assume some degree of literacy and specialization, scribes were given all-round training in writing documents from legal records to scholarly texts. For instance, Šamaš-eṭir, chief priest of the Reš temple in Uruk, wrote ritual procedures,

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mathematical astronomy, and prebendary sale contracts for his associates (Robson 2008). Similarly, writing historical texts was part of scribal culture; there was no distinct discipline of 'history' or profession of 'historian' (cf. Grayson 1980).

It is not known how, if at all, the Babylonians defined 'historical writing' or 'historiography' (Michalowski 1999: 69–90); Akkadian had no word for these concepts. Theoretical considerations, such as are found in some Greek historiographers, are absent, at least in writing. It appears the Babylonian tradition made no distinction between the historicity of what we define as 'myths', 'epics', or 'historical writings': Marduk's creation of the universe, the adventures of Gilgameš, the campaigns of Nebuchadnezzar II were all equally historical events.

In Berossos' time two running accounts of historical events were kept: the Babylonian Chronicles of contemporary events (Glassner 2004: nos. 16–37; Spek and Finkel 2004) and the Astronomical Diaries (Sachs and Hunger 1988–), both terms being modern labels. The Chronicles are historiographical texts that document major events in the political and religious history of Babylon. The Diaries record daily astronomical observations and at the end of each month occasionally add the prices of five market commodities, the level of the Euphrates in Babylon, and outlines of historical events. The events recorded in the Chronicles and the historical sections of the Diaries mainly pertain to king and temple and, especially in the Hellenistic period, are centred on Babylon. The systematic recording of current events (and astronomical phenomena) seems to have originated in the reign of Nabonassar (Nabu-naṣir, r. 747–734 BC) (Grayson 1975a: 10; Spek 2008: 282–283; cf. Brinkman 1990: 79 n. 35, 83–84 n. 60; Glassner 2004: 112). One of the arguments comes from a fragment ascribed to Berossos (FGrH 680 F 16a; see below). It is very likely that the historical sections of the Diaries and the Chronicles of contemporary events are interconnected (Grayson 1975a: 12–14; Spek 2008: 284–287; cf. Brinkman 1990: 95–97), but the precise character of this interdependence is unclear. Although the Diaries as well as possibly the Chronicles were compiled as databases to be used for divination (Rochberg 2004: 147–151; Spek 2003: 289–296; 2008: 284–287), the historical information in them could, of course, secondarily be used for writing historical accounts.

Beside these running accounts of events, in Berossos' time scholars and students composed and copied chronicles recording events from the remote past (Glassner 2004: nos. 38–48; Leichty and Walker 2004), king lists (Grayson 1980–83: 90–101), historical epics (Grayson 1975b), and, mostly fictitious, letters from or to kings (Frahm 2005). The epics and letters are mainly concerned with Babylonian kings who successfully fought against foreign domination. Some texts also express the view that kingship depended on the grace of the god Bel/Marduk—showing that these texts were composed in the milieu of the temple. The relatively high number of historical texts dating from the Late Babylonian period suggests an increased interest in the past at this time (Grayson 1980–83). It is possible that Babylonian scholars looked back to their common past in order to redefine their identity in the new political and cultural context of Greek rule. Berossos' work, too, can be interpreted as part of this

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process of redefining Babylonian cultural identity. The same process took place in other Near East cultures during the Hellenistic period. In Egypt, for instance, the native priest Manetho composed a history of Egypt in Greek (see below).

The *Babyloniaca*

Berossos' work, which was very likely entitled *Babyloniaca* (Schnabel 1923: 16; Kuhrt 1987: 34), has been preserved only in fragments. They have come down to us via a long and complex process of transmission. Most were transmitted in the works of Jewish and Christian authors: the *Antiquitates Judaicae* and *Contra Apionem* of Flavius Josephus (37/8–*c.* 100 AD) and the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea (*c.* 265–340 AD), which is itself lost but known from an Armenian translation (probably written somewhat after the 6th century AD) and from excerpts in the chronographic work of the Byzantine monk Syncellus (composed around 810 AD). Josephus and Eusebius derived their excerpts from the lost epitome (abridgement) that Alexander Polyhistor made of Berossos' work some time between 80 and 40 BC. In addition, the fragments that deal with Babylonian history ascribed to Abydenus—an obscure historian who was probably active in the 2nd or 3rd century AD—also derive from the *Babyloniaca*, although Berossos' name is not mentioned (FGrH 685 F 1–7).

It is impossible to judge how much of Berossos' original work has survived. Nor do we know to what extent the extant fragments reflect the original character of the work. Jewish and Christian authors were predominantly interested in the *Babyloniaca* for apologetic and chronographic reasons: they excerpted the work in order to prove the veracity of the Old Testament and its chronology. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that most extant fragments have a biblical link: the Flood (FGrH 680 F 4a-c), Assyrian and Babylonian kings such as Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar II who are mentioned in the Old Testament (FGrH 680 F 7–8 and 685 F 5–6), the period of the Jews' Babylonian captivity (FGrH 680 F 9–10). In some cases, Jewish and Christian authors manipulated the text in order to enhance its correspondences with the Bible. These authors' selectivity is clearly demonstrated by a fragment from a pagan author, Athenaeus (late 2nd century AD), which sheds a different light on the *Babyloniaca*. It proves that Berossos also wrote on festivals (FGrH 680 F 2):

> A festival called Sacaea is celebrated in Babylon for five days, beginning on the 16th day of the month Loos. During these days it is the custom that the masters are ruled by their slaves and that one of them, who is clothed in a robe similar to that of a king, manages the house. He is also called '*zoganes*' [a word which is otherwise unknown].

What remains of Berossos' original work is thus a biased and sometimes corrupt copy. But despite its fragmentary state, the outline of the *Babyloniaca* can be reconstructed. It consisted of three books, which will be discussed in more detail below.

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In Book 1, after a prologue, Berossos treats the geography and climate of Mesopotamia, its fauna and flora, and, according to my interpretation, the multi-ethnic population of Babylonia. He proceeds with ancient history, describing primeval chaos, the battle between Belos and the Sea, Belos' creation of the universe and men, the uncivilized life of the first men, and Oannes' introduction of civilization (FGrH 680 F 1a-b; FGrH 685 F 1a-b). The first book probably also treated Babylonian customs (FGrH 680 F 2, see below). Books 2 and 3 comprised an overview of Babylonian history from the very first king, Aloros, to Alexander the Great (FGrH 680 F 3a-b–12; F 16a, FGrH 685 F 1a-b–6a-b; and also FGrH 685 F 7). The division between Books 2 and 3 is probably marked by the reign of Nabonasaros (Nabonassar, r. 747–734 BC) (Schnabel 1923: 22–25).

Besides these historical passages, a number of fragments ascribed to Berossos treat astronomical–astrological lore (FGrH F 15; F 16b–22). As Kuhrt (1987: 36–44) has pointed out, these fragments reflect typically Greek-Hellenistic concepts and are therefore not genuine. Berossos the astrologer, who founded a school on Kos and for whom the Athenians erected a statue (FGrH 680 T 6), is a creation of the Hellenistic period, a time in which the origins of esoteric sciences like astrology and alchemy were traced back to the Orient.

Berossos as a Babylonian historian

Berossos aimed to compose a standard work on Babylonian history. As he states in the prologue, his work was based on local written records. When tracing Berossos' sources and analysing how he dealt with them, we face two major problems. First, we have to take into account the obvious fact that not all sources have been recovered nor will be. Texts on perishable material—written in cuneiform as well as Aramaic—have not survived, and nor, of course, has the apparently rich oral tradition. Extant cuneiform sources give only a partial insight into Babylonian culture and historical tradition. It is, therefore, not surprising that we do not know, for instance, the identity of the popular festival that Berossos calls Sacaea (FGrH 680 F 2, quoted above). Everyday culture eludes us almost completely. Second, in the process of transmission the *Babyloniaca* has been drastically adapted and even distorted. Transformations are sometimes easily recognizable. In FGrH 680 F 7c-d Sardanapalos (Assurbanipal, r. 668–*c.* 630 BC), not Nabopolassar, is called the father and predecessor of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 604–562 BC). Elsewhere we read that Nergilos (Nergal-ušezib, r. 693 BC) was killed by his son Adramelos (FGrH 685 F 5). This Adramelos is an adaptation of the biblical name Adramelech (2 Kings 19.37), itself a rendering of the Akkadian name Arda-Mullissu. He was in fact the son and murderer of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC), as cuneiform and biblical sources as well as the parallel text in FGrH 680 F 7c testify (Parpola 1980). If other independent sources are not available such transformations are much more difficult to discern.

Within these limitations an analysis of the fragments shows that the *Babyloniaca* was firmly based on cuneiform sources and native traditions. Berossos' story of primeval chaos and of the creation of the world and humankind (FGrH 680 F 1a-b) reflects a

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tradition close to that of the so-called Babylonian Epic of Creation *Enūma Eliš* (trans. Foster 2005: 436–86). In Berossos' account the story is revealed by one Oannes, a fact not found in the cuneiform version. But this Oannes can be equated with Uan(na), the first of the seven antediluvian sages (*apkallu*s) in Mesopotamian tradition. Berossos' description of him as a fish with a human head and feet corresponds to representations of *apkallu*s in Mesopotamian iconography and literature. Berossos credits Oannes with the introduction of all skills and sciences after whom nothing else had been invented. In cuneiform sources Uan(na) appears as the most important antediluvian sage but no text attributes the introduction of civilization in its entirety to him (Streck 2003–05: 1–2). Perhaps Berossos refers to a lost tradition. He also mentions the six other *apkallu*s (FGrH 680 F 3a-b; 685 F 2a-b), their Greek names mostly being corrupt renderings of the names attested in the cuneiform sources (Dijk 1962: 43–52). Berossos perhaps rendered the name of the second sage Uannadugga as *Ὠαννη-δωγ(γ)α (*Oannèdug(g)a), but later copyists split it up into Ὠάννης (Oannes) and Ἀννήδωτος (Annèdôtos), the latter becoming a generic name for the antediluvian sages. Berossos' list of antediluvian kings and cities (FGrH 680 F 3a-b) is also confirmed by cuneiform tradition (Glassner 2004: 57–58). But while cuneiform sources list no more than nine kings, Berossos' list comprises ten. Jewish or Christian users very likely added a tenth name to Berossos' original list in order to create a parallel with the ten antediluvian generations and patriarchs of the Bible. Berossos replaced the first antediluvian city, Eridu, with Babylon, following a contemporary ideology that equated Babylon with this prestigious ancient city (George 1992: 251–253).

Berossos' account of the Flood Story (FGrH 680 F 4a-b) demonstrates how he combined different traditions into a single narrative. The account is in general agreement with the story as preserved in Tablet XI of the *Epic* of *Gilgameš* (George 2003: 700–725). His name for the Flood hero, Xisuthros, renders Ziusudra, one of the Flood hero's names attested in the cuneiform sources (Civil 1969: 138–145; Spar and Lambert 2005: no. 42). According to Berossos, all writings had been buried in the city of Sippar before the Flood and were recovered afterwards. This tradition is not transmitted by other sources, but its existence is indirectly attested by the *Epic of Erra*, where it is said that Sippar was not destroyed by the Flood (Tablet I, l. 50, trans. Foster 2005: 904). In later tradition the city's name was perhaps associated with *spr*, the Aramaic root for 'to write' (Knobloch 1985). Making associations by wordplay was a common hermeneutic method in Mesopotamian scholarship. The association between Sippar and *spr* could have contributed to the tradition of Sippar as the hiding place of all writings.

Berossos incorporated other elements that are not attested in the extant cuneiform sources but are found in the Old Testament or its pseudepigraphical tradition. These include: the start of the Flood in the second month (Genesis 7.11); the second set of birds released after the Flood returning with muddied feet (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 1.92; cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 1.249–250); and the Flood survivors' return to Babylonia (Genesis 11.2; the pseudepigraphical text Jubilees 10.19; Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 1.109; Ps. Eupolemus FGrH 724 F 1). In all instances, Berossos very likely followed shared Babylonian–Jewish traditions.

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Berossos' overview of dynasties, numbers of kings, and regnal years (FGrH 680 F 5a), albeit heavily distorted, depends on the chronographic tradition attested by the Dynastic Chronicle (Glassner 2004: no. 3). The latter gives an overview of kings and dynasties from the very first—one Alulim (Aloros in Berossos)—to at least the middle of the 8th century BC. The Dynastic Chronicle also incorporated a version of the Flood story and may have begun with a description of the gods' organization of the world (Finkel 1980: 67). The oldest known manuscripts come from the library of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (r. 668–*c*. 630 BC) in Nineveh while the youngest, very fragmentarily preserved, date from the Persian-Hellenistic period and probably originate from Babylon. It is very likely that Berossos knew the Dynastic Chronicle and drew on it as a primary source. Like the *Babyloniaca*, the Dynastic Chronicle combines different genres of texts to give an overview of Babylonian history, uniquely in the Babylonian historiographical tradition. But owing to the fragmentary survival of both the Chronicle and the *Babyloniaca* it must remain unclear to what extent Berossos used the Chronicle's data. Both agree that the first king Alulim/Aloros ruled for 36,000 years and both give comparably long reign lengths for the antediluvian kings (Finkel 1980: 71–72).

According to Eusebius, for the period before Nabonassar Berossos tended just to list the names of kings, relating their deeds inaccurately or even omitting them (FGrH 680 F 3a). Berossos was apparently constrained by his sources: in his time many ancient kings were no more than names collected in king lists. Berossos probably related the (apocryphal) story that 'Nabonasaros collected the records of the kings before him and destroyed them, so that the enumeration of the kings of the Chaldeans started from him' (FGrH 680 F 16a) in order to explain the scarcity of data before the mid-8th century BC (there are no convincing arguments for dismissing the authenticity of this fragment, as Schnabel 1923: 163–164 and Adler and Tuffin 2002: 301 n. 1 would have it).

Berossos' description of Sennacherib's military campaigns in Babylonia (FGrH 680 F 7c) is in general agreement with events as recorded in a Babylonian chronicle (Glassner 2004: no. 16). Some of his phrases seem to reflect the formulaic phraseology of the Chronicles. In general, however, Berossos's reliance on Chronicles seems to have been limited. The events in the last year of Nabopolassar's reign (625–605 BC) are in general agreement with a Babylonian chronicle dealing with that period (Glassner 2004: no. 24), but Berossos gives a more narrative version (FGrH 680 F 8a). Whereas Berossos credits just Nabopolassar with the fall of Nineveh and the end of the Assyrian king Sarakos (Sin-šarru-iškun, r. 626–612 BC) (FGrH 680 F 7d // 685 F 5), a Babylonian chronicle reveals that this was in fact the result of an alliance between Babylonia and the Medes (Glassner 2004: no. 22). Berossos here follows a tradition as preserved in two possibly fictitious Late Babylonian letters that present the war as a conflict between Nabopolassar and Sin-šarru-iškun (Gerardi 1986; Spar and Lambert 2005: no. 44). Berossos also magnifies Cyrus's role in the capture of Babylon in 539 BC. In his account Cyrus seized the city (FGrH 680 F 9a) while a Babylonian chronicle records that Babylon was taken by the Persian army and Cyrus himself arrived only two weeks later (Glassner 2004: no. 26). The discrepancy between Berossos and that chronicle regarding where the Babylonian king Nabonidus (r. 555–539 BC) was captured—Borsippa or Babylon—could be also explained by the exist-

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ence of different traditions. Berossos' statement that Cyrus destroyed the outer wall of Babylon would seem to be contradicted by the archaeological evidence.

It seems, then, that instead of simply repeating the chronicles' accounts verbatim Berossos incorporated more narrative, probably popular traditions that were circulating, as other evidence also shows. Berossos narrates some stories not found in cuneiform sources which resemble accounts by classical authors. For instance, the *Babyloniaca* recounts that after his victory in Cilicia Sennacherib erected and inscribed a statue, and built the city of Tarsus (FGrH 680 F 7c // 685 F 5). Aristobulos (FGrH 139 F 9a-b) and Arrian (*Anabasis Alexandri* 2.5.2–4) both tell of a memorial to Sardanapalos in Cilicia, inscribed with an epitaph in which the king boasted that he had built Anchiale and Tarsus in a single day. And Berossos' story of the last Assyrian king Sarakos who, facing defeat, set himself and his palace in Nineveh on fire (FGrH 680 F 7d // 685 F 5) recalls Ctesias of Cnidus's account of Sardanapalos' death (written *c.* 400 BC) (FGrH 688 F 1b (27.2) and 1q). The similarities suggest that both Berossos and these classical authors drew upon common sources: legends or 'pseudo-historical' stories that circulated in Mesopotamia and throughout the Near East. Classical tradition reconfigured them into tales about their icon of degenerate oriental kingship, Sardanapalos.

The existence of such traditions is proved by an Aramaic papyrus from Egypt, written in Demotic (Pap. Amherst 63: Steiner and Nimms 1985; Vleeming and Wesselius 1985: 31–37). This text, which probably dates from the 4th century BC, gives a romanticized version of the war between Assurbanipal and his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin, who ruled over Babylonia (*c.* 667–648 BC). The names of the protagonists, Sarbanabal (*srbnbl*) and Sarmuge (*srmwgy*), resemble Berossos' names for these kings, Sardanapalos and Sammuges (var. Samoges) and corroborate a Mesopotamian origin for this popular tale.

Just like the erection of the statue and the foundation of Tarsus, the *Babyloniaca*'s account of Sennacherib's preceding campaign against Greek invaders in Cilicia (FGrH 680 F 7c // 685 F 5) also draws on a 'pseudo-historical' tradition. It was based (however indirectly) upon official Assyrian accounts of Sennacherib's Cilician campaign in 696 BC (Luckenbill 1924: 61–62, iv 61–91) combined with descriptions of 'Ionians' raiding the coasts of southeastern Anatolia and Syria in the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) and Sargon II (721–705 BC) (Fuchs 1993: 34, l. 21; 109, ll. 117–119; Parker 2000; on Berossos' account of the Cilician campaign and its aftermath see also Dalley 1999; Lanfranchi 2000: 24–30; Rollinger 2001: 241–242).

Similarly, Berossos' story of the incredibly large reservoir dug by Nebuchadnezzar II above Sippar (FGrH 685 F 6a-b) was probably inspired by the long defensive structure that this king actually constructed there (Black et al. 1987; Gasche et al. 1989). Berossos' account and Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions (see Black et al. 1987: 16–17) agree that the reservoir or moat was *c.* 200 km long. This tradition is further reflected in the work of the 5th-century historian Herodotus (*Histories* 1.185) and Ctesias (FGrH 688 F 1b (9.1)), who ascribe the digging of a large reservoir to Queens Nitocris and Semiramis respectively.

In sum, it is clear that the *Babyloniaca* evidences the existence of a vivid stream of popular historical traditions not preserved in the cuneiform sources. It is difficult to determine whether Berossos' account of the Hanging Gardens built by Nebuchadnezzar

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II for his Median wife also expresses an originally Babylon 'pseudo-historical' tradition. It is now generally accepted that the Hanging Gardens as described in the classical sources never existed, but that the story was based on a real garden in Babylon (Bichler and Rollinger 2005: 202–206; Spek 2008: 313). As for Berossos' version, most historians argue for an originally Greek story adapted by Berossos or interpolated into his text by a later redactor (Bichler and Rollinger 2005: 167–172; Spek 2008: 311–313). An answer to this problem also depends on how we assess Berossos' authorship. Did he use and adapt only Mesopotamian traditions or did he also fabricate stories and invent a Babylonian origin for popular Greek tales about Babylonia?

Berossos as a Greek historian

Berossos conceived his *Babyloniaca* as an introduction to Babylonian history and culture for a Greek-speaking audience. Writing in Greek was not in itself sufficient to appeal to his intended readership. Berossos also had to adopt Greek forms, conventions and concepts. He organized his work as a Greek historical ethnography, an obvious choice for his purpose in describing the history and culture of a country alien to most Greeks. No comparable genre was known in cuneiform literature. It was most probably the first time that a Babylonian had composed a narrative overview of Babylonian history. Yet in Berossos' time Greek historical ethnography was a well-established genre with its own rules and conventions (Jacoby 1909: 109–121; Fornara 1983: 16–23).

A typical Greek historical ethnography is in four parts: 1 geography; 2 origins; 3 historical overview; 4 customs. As our overview of the contents demonstrates (see above), the first three constituents are certainly found in the *Babyloniaca*—in itself a conventional type of title for a Greek ethnography. It is uncertain whether Berossos also dealt with the fourth element, Babylonian customs. Describing the remarkable or bizarre customs, ideas, and inventions of foreign people was a favourite topic in Greek ethnographies. One fragment of the *Babyloniaca* describes the Sacaea festival (FGrH 680 F 2; quoted above). It is perhaps too hazardous to deduce from only one passage that Berossos included an elaborate treatise on Babylonian customs in his work. It is possible that the fragment was no more than a digression or aside. Murray (1972: 209) asserts that Berossos did not treat customs because he could not distance himself enough from his own culture. The absence of more information on customs may, however, result from the narrow interests of the main excerptors of the *Babyloniaca*: as we have seen, Jewish and Christian authors were not interested in Babylonian customs. It is no coincidence that it was a pagan author, Athenaeus, who copied the passage about the festival. These circumstances make it plausible that Berossos did indeed discuss Babylonian customs in his work.

The 'proem' with which Berossos prefaced his work is also a device borrowed from Greek literature addressing Greek issues. Berossos used it to present himself to his audience (FGrH 680 F 1a-b). In Mesopotamia self-presentation by a non-royal author was rare. Most works were anonymous. It is very likely that Berossos stated he was a

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priest of Belos, thereby stressing his authorial reliability. For Greek readers, oriental 'priests' were the experts and bearers of their native culture—a view that, as we have seen, conforms to reality. Like other Greek authors, Berossos presented the sources upon which he would base his history and emphasized their reliability too: ancient written sources, 'records of many' that 'had been preserved with great care in Babylon' and which encompassed myriads of years. Emphasis on reliable sources, often gratuitous, is a commonplace in Greek historiography. Herodotus writes that he spoke with Egyptian priests and used Egyptian records (2.3 and 99), while Ctesias says that his *Persica* was based on the Persian royal archives (FGrH 688 F 1b (32.4)).

Berossos did not only know the rules of the Greek genre of historical ethnography; his work shows that he was also acquainted with what Greek historians had written on Babylonia before him. In his time the works of Herodotus and Ctesias predominantly determined the Greek image of Mesopotamian history. Herodotus included a short digression on Babylonia in his *Histories* (1.178–200) and made short remarks on Mesopotamian history elsewhere (Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella 2007: 203–204). Ctesias, physician at the court of Artaxerxes II around 400 BC, dedicated the first six books of his *Persica*, which is preserved only in fragments, to the history of Assyria and Babylonia (FGrH 688; Lenfant 2004). Berossos censures Greek historians for wrongly believing that Semiramis founded Babylon and built the city's marvellous constructions (FGrH 680 F 8a), as Ctesias has it (FGrH 688 F 1b (7.2–9.9)). According to *Enūma Eliš* (Tablet V, ll. 117–130; trans. Foster 2005: 467–468), it was the god Bel/Marduk who founded Babylon; presumably Berossos accepted this view. In Berossos' account, it was Nebuchadnezzar II who was responsible for Babylon's splendid buildings. He also states that Nebuchadnezzar constructed walls over the Euphrates so that no enemy could divert the river away from the city. This is probably an implicit refutation of the story told by Herodotus (*Histories* 1.191) and Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* 7.5.9–21) that the Persian king Cyrus took Babylon by diverting the Euphrates. Burstein (1978: 34) speculates that Berossos also corrected the Greeks in their dating of Semiramis. Berossos' criticism of earlier Greek historians was both justified and normal. Criticizing predecessors was common practice among Greek historians, who wrote in a competitive environment (Lloyd 2002: 14–22). Ctesias, for instance, had called Herodotus a liar and storyteller (FGrH 688 T 8).

Berossos was familiar with Greek philosophers' ways of rationalizing myths—at least if the comments transmitted in the text are by him and not from a later commentator. In Berossos' creation story (FGrH 680 F 1a-b), it is said that first everything was water (a reference to the primeval ocean, personified by Tiamat in *Enūma Eliš*) and that fabulous beings came to life in it. This is an allegory, the text later explains, meaning that in the beginning everything was moist and creatures spontaneously came into being in it. Water as first element and the autogenesis of life in it were mainstream Greek philosophical concepts, first expressed by Presocratics such as Thales of Miletus and Anaximander in the 6th century BC (Diels and Kranz 1951–52: no. 11, fr. A 12; no. 12, fr. 11, 30). More generally, explaining myths in terms of physiological processes was a well-known practice in some Greek philosophical schools (Cancik-Lindemaier and Sigel 1996: 518–523).

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The explicit explanation of an aetiology in the same creation story is very probably attributable to Berossos himself: humankind was created by mixing earth with the blood of a decapitated god and it is for this reason that humankind is intelligent. This aetiology is implied in the epic of *Atram-hasis* (Late Babylonian version, Tablet II, ll. 98–100, 110–112, trans. Foster 2005: 260–261) but Berossos added the elucidation for his Greek readers, who were unfamiliar with Babylonian hermeneutics. Berossos' portrayal of Oannes is perhaps another example of his transformation of Babylonian concepts into Greek ones (De Breucker 2003a: 28–29). He represents him just like a Greek 'first inventor' or 'culture hero'. In the same way, the Jewish historian Josephus later adapted biblical figures such as Abraham and Moses to suit Greek tastes in the 1st century AD (Feldman 1968; 1991–93).

Some minor adaptations further demonstrate not only Berossos' knowledge of Greek culture but also his efforts to make Babylonian material accessible to his intended audience. For instance, Berossos identified Ea, the Babylonian god of wisdom who instructed the Flood hero, with Kronos (FGrH 680 F 4a-b), instead of transliterating Ea's name into Greek as he did with the antediluvian sages. The identification of Ea and Kronos is not based on similar divine competencies, but on the fact that both gods were fathers of the head of the pantheon, namely Bel and Zeus. Similarly Berossos translated the name of the female personified primeval ocean, Tiamat (Akkadian for 'Sea'), into Greek, Thalassa. He used Macedonian month names, which were used by the Seleucid administration in Babylonia (Loos, FGrH 680 F 2; Daisios, FGrH 680 F 4a-b). He replaced the name of the barbaric Gutians with the Medes (FGrH 680 F 5a), a people known to Greeks and who, like the Gutians, originated from northwest Iran. This equation is also attested in cuneiform texts from the late first millennium BC, but there it is the Medes who are archaically called Gutians (e.g. Glassner 2004: no. 26, iii 15; no. 30, rev. 12').

One can only conclude that Berossos was well versed in Greek culture. He knew works of Greek historiography and literature and was familiar with Greek philosophical concepts. He may have been a Babylonian scholar by training but he was also aware of idioms and conventions expected by his readers.

Berossos' portrait of Babylonian history and its wider cultural context

Berossos portrays Babylonia as having a long and continuous history. The antediluvian period, he says, lasted for no less than 120 *saroi* (derived from Akkadian *šār*, '3,600'), namely 432,000 years (FGrH 680 F 3a-b). The parallel passage in the Dynastic Chronicle (Glassner 2004: no. 3) is fragmentary but hints at a comparable number. The Flood, despite its all-destructive character, did not breach that continuity. Babylonian culture was not lost because all antediluvian writings survived. As we have seen, this account also reflects a cuneiform tradition. For Berossos the Babylonian culture was unique and autonomous: Oannes brought civilization to the Babylonians, after which time nothing else had been invented (FGrH 680 F 1a-b).

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In his treatment of the antediluvian kings Berossos not only mentions, as the cuneiform sources do, which city each of them came from. He also adds in several instances that the king was a Babylonian (FGrH 680 F 3a-b), thus emphasizing the rulers' native origins to his Greek audience, for whom indigenous rulers signalled a country's prestige. This explicit formulation is not found in the cuneiform sources, for whose readers it was a tacit assumption. Whereas the Sumerian King List (Glassner 2004: no. 1) lists the Gutians as one of many postdiluvian dynasties, Berossos calculated how many years had passed from the Flood to the Gutians' conquest of Babylon (FGrH 680 F 5a), suggesting that an era had come to an end. Berossos seems to have considered the conquest as a landmark in Mesopotamian history, as the first time that Babylon had been under foreign rule. In reality, the settlement of Babylon was of no importance at the time of the Gutian attacks in the late third millennium BC and may not even have existed yet. This, in combination with the fact that Berossos names Babylon as the first antediluvian city (see above), clearly indicates that his history was centred on Babylon, combining the city's history with that of his country.

Berossos' portrait of Babylonian history and culture can be interpreted as a contribution to the then ongoing debate on the priority of cultures. It was triggered by the hegemony of Greek culture in the Hellenistic period and intensified by closer contacts between cultures at that time. For the Greeks, chronological priority entailed authority and superiority. The Greeks admitted that their own culture was much younger than those of the Middle East. Egypt, however, did not claim such antiquity as Berossos did. Manetho, an Egyptian priest and younger contemporary of Berossos, wrote a history of Egypt in Greek called *Aegyptiaca*, based on native sources. He ascribes only 24,900 years to the mythical period of ancient times (FGrH 609 F 3a). For Berossos it was clear that his sources proved that Babylonia surpassed all other cultures in its antiquity and was thus due the most respect.

There was also much argument about which cultures were dependent on which others. Because native origins contributed much to a people's prestige, the Athenians, for example, created an indigenous origin for themselves (Loraux 2000: 13–27; Zacharia 2003: 56–65). According to Hecataeus of Abdera, who—like Manetho—wrote a history of Egypt called *Aegyptiaca*, probably at the end of the 4th century BC, Egypt had colonists spread over the whole world, thus diffusing Egyptian culture (Diodorus Siculus 1.28.1). Indeed, on this account even Belos was an Egyptian colonist who had settled in Babylonia and organized the Babylonian priesthood on Egyptian principles. In observing the stars these 'Chaldaeans' were merely imitating the Egyptians (Diodorus Siculus 1.28.1–2)—a declaration that would have seemed like a slap in the face to a Babylonian like Berossos. Berossos' assertion that Oannes antedated all other culture heroes, and that since his time there had been no other inventions clearly implies that all cultures were dependent on Babylonia. Explicitly or implicitly, Berossos contended that Babylonia was the cradle of civilization.

It is very likely that Berossos knew and reacted against Hecataeus' *Aegyptiaca*, which now survives only in fragments (FGrH 264 F 3–5, F 25; Kuhrt 1987: 56). Since it is uncertain how much Diodorus Siculus relied on Hecataeus in writing his own account of

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Egyptian history in the 1st century BC (Burton 1972: 1–34), the precise character of this intertextuality must remain speculative.

Berossos' portrait of Nebuchadnezzar II can be seen as a Babylonian response to the character of the great Egyptian pharaoh Sesostris, as portrayed by Herodotus (2.102–10) and Hecataeus (Diodorus Siculus. 1.53–8, where he is called Sesoösis). For Berossos Nebuchadnezzar II or, as he calls him, Nabokodrosoros (the Greek rendering of Nabu-kudurri-uṣur) surpassed all previous kings of Babylonia in greatness (FGrH 680 F 8a). The king is also mentioned by one Megasthenes, Seleukos I's ambassador to the Mauryan king Chandragupta, who wrote a work on India in around 300 BC. Megasthenes ranked Nabokodrosoros—he uses the same name as Berossos—among barbarian world conquerors (FGrH 715 F 11a). According to Kuhrt (1987: 56), Berossos built on Megasthenes' image of Nabokodrosoros but it is more likely that he and Berossos reflect the same Babylonian tradition. Nebuchadnezzar II's great reputation during the Hellenistic period is proved by an Astronomical Diary. It records that in 187 BC—some 400 years after his reign—a purple robe that had belonged to Nebuchadnezzar II was still kept in the treasury of the Esangila temple. It seems have been presented to Antiochos III (r. 241–187 BC) during his visit to Babylon (Sachs and Hunger 1988–: -187A, rev. 11'–12').

Some authors argue that Berossos supported Seleucid royal policy or aimed to influence it (Burstein 1978: 5; Kuhrt 1987: 56; Dillery 2007: 228–9). His account of the conquest of Coele Syria and Phoenicia in the Levant by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC) and again by Nebuchadnezzar II (FGrH 685 F 5 and 680 F 8a) could be interpreted as an expression of support for Seleucid claims on these regions, then occupied by the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt (Burstein 1978: 25 n. 93). Berossos' reaction against Hecataeus of Abdera, who was connected to the court of Ptolemy I, could also be seen in the light of the rivalry between Seleucids and Ptolemies.

It is sometimes argued that Berossos composed his work with the patronage, or at the request, of Antiochos I (Murray 1972: 209; Burstein 1978: 5; Kuhrt 1987: 55). But Berossos' dedication of his work to that king (FGrH 680 T 2) does not necessitate such an interpretation. It could have been prompted by the close interconnections between the royal administration and the temple elite of Babylon, who represented the local population (Spek 1987) and were dependent on the king. The Seleucids controlled the temples de facto and supported and sponsored the traditional religion. Berossos could equally have dedicated his work speculatively, in order to attract the king's interest and support (Meißner 1992: 497).

Conclusions

Towards the beginning of the Hellenistic period Berossos, a Babylonian scholar embedded in ancient tradition, opened up the heritage of his civilization to the outside world. He composed a history of his country in the Greek language and called it *Babyloniaca*. It can be considered as a 'historical canon', an introduction to everything the author

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thought his intended Greek-speaking audience should know about Babylonian history and culture.

In his work Berossos combined Babylonian and Greek scholarship. As my analysis has shown, the *Babyloniaca* was firmly based on native, Babylonian sources, exemplifying the spirited persistence of age-old Babylonian scholarly culture. But as I have also revealed, the *Babyloniaca* contains historical traditions that are not preserved in cuneiform sources, thereby hinting at the wealth of native traditions which flourished alongside cuneiform culture. The *Babyloniaca* bears witness to the multi-faceted nature of Babylonian culture in Berossos' time. Berossos reworked and adapted his indigenous material to fit Greek forms and concepts and thereby transformed himself into a Greek historian. This was a Babylonian scholar who was also deeply versed in Greek culture and literature. Berossos and his work were true exponents of Hellenism, as it emerged shortly after the foundation of the Hellenistic states at the turn of the 3rd century BC. In this way, studying the *Babyloniaca* can help us to reappraise the process of Hellenization in Babylonia.

Unfortunately, there is no information on how Antiochos I and his entourage received the *Babyloniaca*. Nor do we know anything about its impact in the Hellenistic world or in the Hellenized milieu of Babylonia itself. The antediluvian sage (*apkallu*) was a popular motif on seals in Seleucid Uruk (Wallenfels 1993; 1994: 39–41, nos. 180–188). An inscription commemorating the restoration of the Reš, the main temple of Uruk, in 202 BC by the 'Hellenized' Babylonian Anu-uballiṭ/Kephalon, attributes the temple's foundation to Uan (Oannes) (Dijk 1962: 47, ll. 6–7)—an invented tradition because the temple was only founded in the 5th century BC. It is impossible to determine whether the *Babyloniaca* enhanced the popularity of the *apkallu* tradition or is just another testimony of it. The fact that centuries later the *Babyloniaca* mainly circulated in Graeco-Roman antiquarian circles and among Jews and Christians is no criterion for its popularity in earlier times. As in present time, books are exposed to changing tastes and interests.

Berossos built a bridge between Babylonian and Greek culture. He built another bridge too. After the disappearance of cuneiform culture the fragments of the *Babyloniaca* constituted one of the most important sources of Mesopotamian history for many centuries until the rediscovery of Mesopotamia in the 19th century—which now proves the value of Berossos and his work.

Further reading

Kuhrt (1987) offers a valuable introduction to the *Babyloniaca* and tackles the question of the astronomical and astrological fragments ascribed to Berossos. Burstein (1978) gives an English translation of and concise commentary on the fragments. The translation by Verbrugghe and Wickersham (1996), preceded by an introduction, should be used with caution. My own English translation and commentary is published in the online resource *Brill's New Jacoby*, ed. Worthington (2007–; www.brillonline.nl).

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PART VII

SHAPING TRADITION

HALF a century ago, A. Leo Oppenheim (1960: 410–411; cf. 1977: 13) coined the felicitous phrase 'the stream of tradition' for 'what can for convenience be called the corpus of literary works of various types that was maintained, controlled, and carefully kept alive by a tradition served by successive generations of learned and well-trained scribes'. Assyriologists were quick to adopt this elegant term to describe the apparent consistency of cuneiform scholarship across time and space, particularly in the first millennium BC. Reiner (1967: 177) already calls it 'accepted' and, for good reason, it is still in common currency today (e.g. Halton 2009; Ambos 2010: 17).

Yet Eric Hobsbawm and colleagues have convincingly argued that 'tradition' is not as simple it first appears, at least in the modern world: '"traditions" which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented' (Hobsbawm 1992: 1) or—especially in colonial contexts—'imagined' (Ranger 1993; cf., e.g., Scheid 2006; Otto 2007). Hobsbawm contrasts 'tradition', which 'imposes fixed (normally formalized) practices, such as repetition' with 'custom', which 'does not preclude innovation and change up to a point' but which 'must appear compatible or even identical with precedent' (Hobsbawm 1992: 2). Finally, there is 'convention or routine, which has no significant ritual or symbolic function as such, though it may acquire it incidentally' and which is 'designed to facilitate readily definable practical operations, and [is] readily modified or abandoned to meet changing practical needs, always allowing for the inertia which any practice acquires with time and the emotional resistance to any innovation by people who have become attached to it' (Hobsbawm 1992: 3).

In Assyriology, too, there is increasing interest in the idea that there was more to cuneiform culture than effortless continuity, and that literate and elite communities

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forged complex relationships with the past that they remade periodically to suit new political, social, and intellectual contexts. In Chapter 33, for instance, Nicole Brisch explores the complicated and often contradictory strands in Sumerian literary fashions of the early second millennium BC, which encompassed both nostalgia for the ideal kings of the past and a distancing from them. In a much broader chronological sweep, in Chapter 31 Frans Wiggermann charts the gradual demise of agriculture in scholarly thought as cuneiform culture became ever more urbanized. By contrast, in Chapter 32 Barbara Böck argues for a relatively conservative tradition in Mesopotamian medicine, whereby new compilations of recipes and plant lists came into being but the underlying therapeutic methods and ingredients stayed essentially the same.

The final two chapters of the volume present detailed studies of communities in relation to their pasts at a particular point in time. In Chapter 34, Caroline Waerzeggers untangles the complex web of power relationships between royalty, divinity, and tradition in the mid-first millennium BC, whereby each corner of the triangle gained legitimacy through the support of the others. And in Chapter 35, Philippe Clancier surveys the end of the cuneiform tradition in Hellenistic Uruk, and its efforts to accommodate and resist Greek majority culture.

Chapters in other parts of the book also touch on these themes. Most obviously, all the chapters of Part VI deal with the obverse side of tradition, custom, and convention. In Chapter 4 Niek Veldhuis considers the uses of the past in Old Babylonian scribal education, while in Chapter 24 Eckart Frahm surveys first-millennium scholars' ideas about their predecessors. In Chapter 21 Ulla Koch traces the twin traditions of astrology and extispicy. The chief lamenter Ur-Utu's relationship with his family's past is explored by Michel Tanret in Chapter 13, while Yoram Cohen and Sivan Kedar show how fast cuneiform traditions could change, in Chapter 11.

Further reading

Veldhuis (2004) presents Old Babylonian scribal schooling as an invented tradition, the 'creation of a Sumerian heritage'. A series of articles by Beaulieu (1992; 1994; 2003) explores elite antiquarianism in the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods. Beyond Assyriology, Lloyd (2009) looks at the origins of a variety of disclipinary traditions in the ancient world, especially Greece and China, while Finkelberg and Stroumsa (2003) collect a series of essays on ancient canons and literary traditions.

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CHAPTER 31

AGRICULTURE AS CIVILIZATION: SAGES, FARMERS, AND BARBARIANS

F.A.M. WIGGERMANN

An exceptionally explicit iconographic monument dating back to the beginnings of cuneiform culture in southern Mesopotamia, the Uruk Vase, visualizes the hierarchical relations between the physical world, mankind, the ruler, and the gods (Figure 31.1). The lower register divides the physical world into its three meaningful components: water, representing the rivers and canals that make life possible; grain and flax, the crops that feed and clothe kings and farmers alike; and rams and ewes, meat and wool, representing the contribution of the herdsman. The upper register shows the ruler approaching the city's goddess Inana, waiting in front of her temple and at the point of inviting him inside, where preparations for a banquet have been made. The ruler, called *en* in Sumerian, is accompanied by his deputy (probably the official named *lagar* in Sumerian), and by members of the general population, shown approaching in the middle register. All carry gifts to the temple, the population baskets and vessels filled with (agricultural) products, unidentified but for the ear of grain that at once identifies the occasion as a first-fruits festival after the successful harvest. Assisted by his deputy, the ruler carries a piece of cloth, but a sherd is missing here, and the restoration remains uncertain. The piece of cloth may be a bedspread, the ruler's gift to the goddess on the occasion of their wedding, or, in cultic terms, on the occasion of the sacred marriage between him and the divine head of state. Reconstructing backwards in time from later textual evidence, it appears that in this rite each successive ruler of Uruk embodied Inana's supernatural husband, the dying and resurrecting god Dumuzi (Strommenger 2008).

When cuneiform writing was invented at the end of the fourth millennium BC, agriculture, the foundation of urban life in the steppes and plains of Mesopotamia, had a long history behind it. Over time its realities had adapted to the changing conditions of climate, soil, technology, and social organization, and ideals had changed with them—

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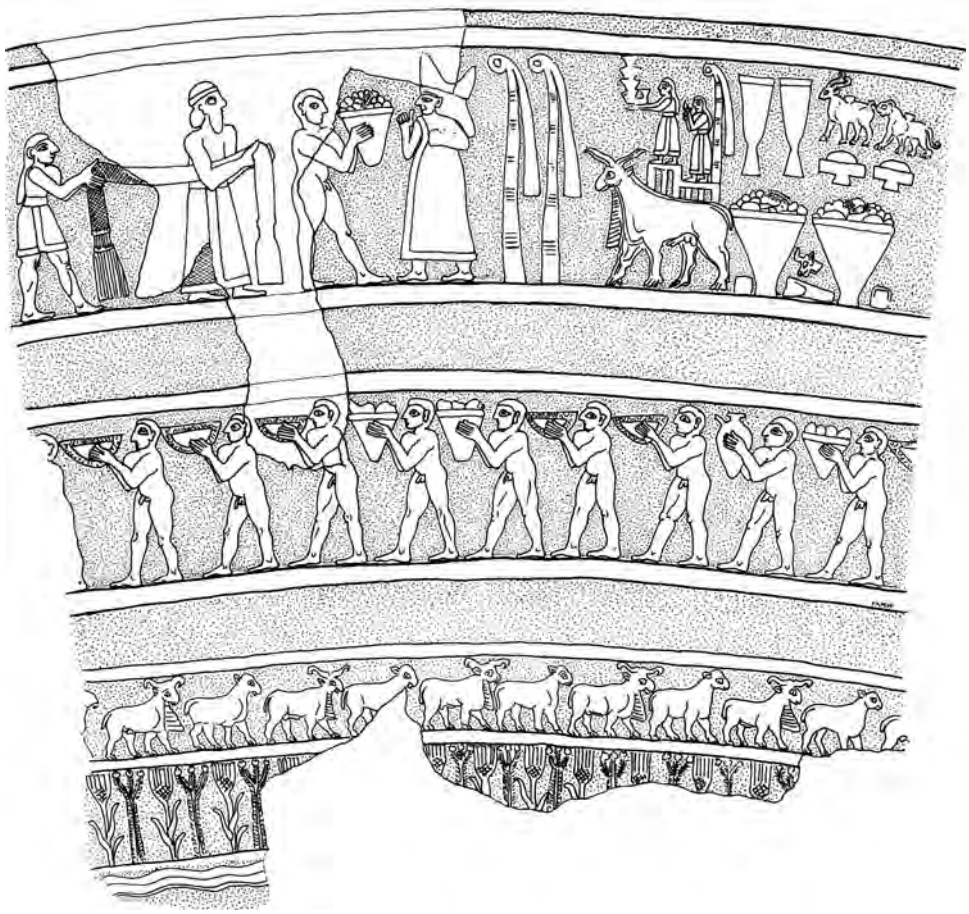

FIGURE 31.1 Relief from a cultic vase, from late fourth-millennium BC Uruk, relating the elements of urban civilization in a hierarchical order: (*bottom to top*) water, vegetation (grain and flax), sheep, the agrarian population, the upper class (the ruler and his deputy), and the city's goddess Inana, the head of the state. (Drawing by F.A.M. Wiggermann, after Lindemeyer and Martin 1993: 81, no. 226)

presumably that is, since the only evidence before the onset of writing is archaeological and consequently hard to interpret. The advent of writing did not change the process of gradual adaptation, but it did change its pace, and redirected its content.

Without scribes no writing, but the extent of their influence must not be overrated. There were other forces shaping cuneiform culture: the demands of king, state, priesthood, and cult; interactions with popular wisdom, magic, and divination; and the examples of folk taxonomy and oral history.

The emerging state bred administration, administration then bred cuneiform, and thus from the start and throughout history writing served the common cause, and was concerned with the management and administration of resources: water, land, grain, livestock, and labour. From about half way through the third millennium, royal

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inscriptions add progressively more explicit information on practical matters such as the digging of canals, the planting of gardens, and disputes over land and water. At about the same time the scribes widened their horizons, and started to show an interest in wisdom through recording proverbs, a first step towards their later status as sages.

In the course of time the Mesopotamian states became ever more distant from their toiling subjects, and the scholars, most of them state servants, followed this trend: whereas third- and early second-millennium literary texts reveal a strong interest in the state's agricultural base and the life of the farmer, typical later products such as wisdom compositions and the so-called 'Epic of Creation' *Enūma Eliš* exhibit a marked urban and governmental bias, and virtually ignore the rural component of society. Meanwhile the common scribe was still recording harvests and writing letters in the provinces, but he was not the one who produced the literature and scholarship that we find in the libraries of the learned.

As exorcists the scholars catered to the general public as well as to the court, and the existence of rituals pertaining to agricultural problems points to an awareness of the needs of the farmer. This type of text is relatively uncommon, however, and its survival in the late libraries reflects antiquarian interests, at least in part, rather than actual practice. As could be expected, however, the urban elite's abiding concern for the fertility of its fields continues to be revealed in first-millennium library texts, letters, and royal inscriptions (e.g. Livingstone 1999; Radner 2000).

Water, steppes, and plains

People eat grain, sheep and goats eat grasses; grain and grasses need a minimum amount of water to grow and survive until they are eaten. On the basis of the availability of water three different geographical zones can be defined for Mesopotamian agriculture, each with its own characteristic habits, language or dialect, and cultural identity.

In the northwest, north, and northeast an arc-shaped zone running along the Taurus and the Zagros mountain ranges receives more than 200 mm of rain annually, which allows dry-farming (Figure 31.2; cf. Wilkinson 2000). This zone, known as the fertile crescent, included important population centres around Nineveh (Ninua) and in the Habur triangle to the west of it. Assur, one of the capitals of Assyria, lies just outside this zone, and was settled only in the third millennium, perhaps originally as a pastoralist cult place for the local mountain-god Aššur. Other northern cities, Nineveh for instance, have histories that go back to the beginning of agriculture and settled life in the area. Additional irrigation from rivers and wells ensured regular harvests in marginal or overpopulated regions (e.g. Bagg 2000).

In the progressively more rainless lands to the south of the fertile crescent agriculture and settled life was possible only with irrigation. The rivers that supply the water are the Euphrates, the Tigris, and the Diyala, a tributary flowing into the Tigris from the Sulaimaniyah plain. Irrigation becomes practicable once the rivers have left the plateau, not far to the northwest

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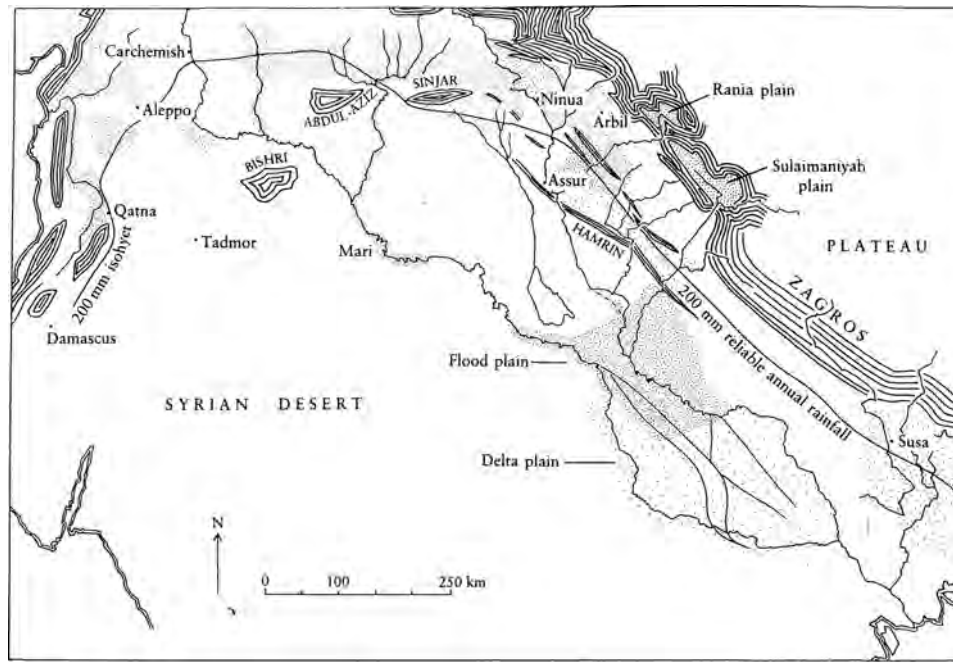

FIGURE 31.2 Agricultural zones and population densities (shaded) in Mesopotamia and Syria. (Reproduced from Postgate 1994: Fig. 1.7)

of present-day Baghdad. The annual floods were determined by the melting of the mountain snow, bringing high water to Mesopotamia between April and early June. The often violent floods could destroy harvests and damage the canal system (Wilcke 1999).

The irrigation zone can be divided into three sub-zones, from north to south: the river plain (including the Diyala plain), the delta, and the marsh (Figure 31.3). In the delta, which together with the marsh corresponds to ancient Sumer, the plain has almost no gradient, and the water could easily be divided over a network of large and small canals, thus reducing the threat of periodic destructions by violent floods. In the river plain, corresponding to ancient Akkad, a system of irrigation canals was less easy to maintain; high-energy floods, heavily laden with silts, clogged canals with sediment, and required labour-intensive cleaning to prevent destructive bursts of flood water. In the later part of the third millennium low gradients, permanent irrigation, and poor drainage caused salinization of the soil, and a shift from wheat to the more salt-tolerant barley, especially in the delta (Jacobsen 1982; Powell 1985; Artzy and Hillel 1988). Nippur, the national shrine of the earlier periods, is located centrally between the two regions constituting the irrigation zone: the delta (Sumer), and the plain (Akkad).

Because of insufficient rainfall or the absence of rivers suitable for irrigation, immense tracts of land surrounding and penetrating the patchwork of villages and cities were unfit for agriculture and permanent habitation (Figures 31.2 and 31.3). Pastoral nomadism is a way of life adapted to the exploitation of this marginal land; it involves seasonal

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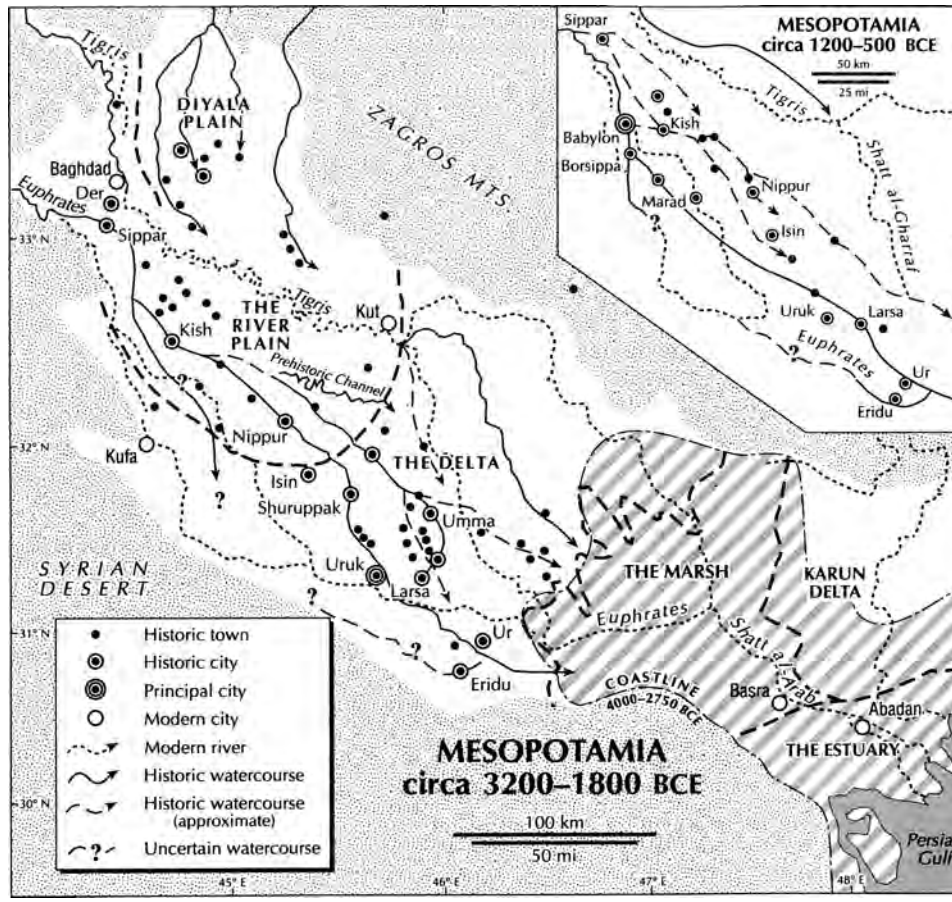

FIGURE 31.3 Major towns, environmental regions, and reconstructed watercourses of southern Mesopotamia. (Reproduced from Butzer 1995: 143, Map 5)

movement between different environmental niches to provide pasture for herds of domesticated animals: sheep, goats, and to a lesser extent cattle. Pastoral nomadism occurs in various gradations, from the purely nomadic (rare) to the more or less sedentary. Settled branches of tribes lived in their own villages, or in the cities, where some of them (such as the Amorites in the late third millennium) became powerful political players (Robertson 2006). The equilibrium between the settled and pastoralist components was affected by climatic fluctuations, wetter periods favouring farming and urbanism, drier periods inducing urban contraction and pastoralist expansion. In fact it seems that the attested or presumed periods of drought can be made to match the major historical power shifts, but the subject is disputed (Robertson 2006).

Mesopotamian farming was essentially subsistence farming, its produce being meant for consumption, not for trade. Fields and gardens produced cereals (wheat, barley, millet, later also rice), pulses (lentils, various types of peas and beans), vegetables (onions,

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garlic, leeks, cucumbers, squash, lettuce), herbs and spices (coriander, cress, cumin, black cumin, fennel, mint), oil plants (linseed, sesame), and fruit (dates, figs, grapes, pomegranates, pears, quinces, berries) (Potts 1997: 56–90). Except in emergency situations, the import of foodstuffs was rare. Luxuries such as wine and honey were not produced in Babylonia, but reached the land in small quantities from the northwest.

Domesticated animals (sheep, goat, cattle) provided meat, milk products, traction (ox, donkey), and transport (donkey, later also horse and camel). Flax fibres and wool were used for the manufacture of textiles. Textiles are generally considered to have been Mesopotamia's main export product. Hunting complemented the food supply (Salonen 1976), but since it fell below the horizon of the administration the evidence is slim and unsystematic. Seals and palace reliefs show edible animals such as wild pigs, deer, gazelles, ostriches, and various types of birds being hunted or caught; rare texts and excavated bones attest to their presence on the dinner table (e.g. Wiggermann 2000: 198–199).

Productivity was relatively high (Renger 2002: 250), so that 'considerable proportions of the population could be maintained in specialized pursuits rather than agriculture itself' (Adams 1981: 243), the prime condition for an urban lifestyle.

A number of Sumerian literary texts dating to the late third or early second millennium elaborate on the realities of farming. *The Farmer's Instructions* (ETCSL 5.6.3; Civil 1994) goes step by step through the agricultural year: the annual flooding in the spring, hoeing and ploughing to prepare the fields, harrowing, sowing, maintaining the furrows, irrigating (three or four times), harvesting, threshing, winnowing, and storing the produce; the 'instructions' are ascribed to Ninurta himself, the 'faithful farmer of Enlil'. *The Song of the Ploughing Oxen* (ECTSL 5.5.5) exhorts the oxen to put their neck under the yoke. Disputations discuss the relative merits of *Summer and Winter* (ETCSL 5.3.3; Vanstiphout 1997c), *Hoe and Plough* (ETCSL 5.3.1; Vanstiphout 1997b), *Ewe and Wheat* (ETCSL 5.3.2; Vanstiphout 1997a), and *Herdsman and Farmer*, represented by the shepherd-god Dumuzi and Enlil's farmer Enkimdu (ETCSL 4.08.33; Sefati 1998: 324–325). A selection of these and other more mythologically inspired early texts form the basis of the views presented below.

Cosmic foundations and the diachronic other

Mythology construes an ideal, eternal cosmos giving sense to the contingencies of imperfect reality. The cosmos was thought to have come about, or been brought into being, in a number of stages, the last and final one being the actual world. Cosmological myths are basically genealogies of the gods or deified entities that produced the actual world. In the actual world the ancestor-gods have become inert cosmic elements, still there, but reduced to 'dead', 'bound', or 'defeated' former rulers that do not need care and

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feeding. Groups of destructive demons (Sumerian *udug* and *azag*; Akkadian *utukku* and *asakku*), the brood of deified Heaven and Earth, formed a still active part of the primeval cosmos; they too did not have a cult (Wiggermann 1996).

From the centre of the world, initially Nippur, later Babylon, the gods populated the earth, and created mankind to take care of their needs. To facilitate mankind's service and their own leisurely life they organized the earth and the year—space and time—and created the essential conditions of subsistence.

An early cosmogony was transmitted in the form of a geneaological list, presumably recited during the wailing ceremony for the ancestors of Enlil that was held in Nippur in the seventh month, named *Dukug* 'Holy Mound' in Sumerian, and *Tašrītu* 'Beginning' in Akkadian (Wiggermann 1992). The whole series of Enlil's ancestors—seven, fourteen, or twenty-one in the various sources—are summarized as the Enki and the Ninki deities, literally the 'Lords and Ladies Earth'. The Earth was part of the inert primeval cosmos, and thus not a personalized, anthropomorphic deity that could be addressed or beseeched; or, from the farmer's point of view, the Earth was a commodity rather than a nurturing mother.

The last deified entity before Enlil was the Dukug 'Holy Mound', for the sake of sexual procreation split into a male–female pair, 'Lord Dukug' and 'Lady Dukug'. From and on the Holy Mound, Enlil (literally 'Lord Air') was born, who by his very nature separated Heaven and Earth, and brought the actual cosmos into being. What happened next must be synthesized from allusions in various sources. Other gods were born, among them the Moon (Nanna), the Sun (Utu), and Venus (Inana); formless time turned into days, months, seasons, and years. The gods dug canals and rivers, and mankind was created but, according to the Sumerian disputation *Ewe and Wheat*:

> The people of those distant days
> Knew not bread to eat,
> They knew not cloth to wear;
> They went about in the land with naked limbs
> Eating grass with their mouths like sheep,
> And drinking water from the ditches. (Vanstiphout 1997a; ETCSL 5.3.2, ll. 20–25)

The gods remedied the situation by creating two goddesses, Ewe (Lahar) and Wheat (Ezina/Ašnan), whom they sent down from the Holy Mound to feed and cloth the people. The poem continues (ll. 45–55):

> For Wheat they (the gods) made a field,
> And bestowed on her plow and yoke and team.
> Ewe, standing in her sheepfold,
> Was a shepherd full of the sheepfold's splendor;
> Wheat, standing in her furrow,
> Was a shapely girl radiating beauty
> Lifting her noble head high above the field
> She was suffused with bounty from the skies.
> Thus both Ewe and Wheat were radiant in appearance,

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And among the gathered people they caused abundance,
And in the land (Sumer) they brought well-being.

Sumerian mythology is not systematic, and a contemporary myth transmits a variant view on the origin of Wheat (ECTSL 1.7.6, ll. 1–3, 7):

The people ate grass with their mouths like sheep,
In those distant days they did not [know] wheat, barley or flax
An (Heaven) brought them down from the interior of Heaven,
. . . . .
Enlil heaped up the grain, and gave it to the mountains.

Then, against the initial intentions of their father Enlil, the gods Ninazu and his brother Ninmada (about whom more below), decided to bring grain and flax from the mountains to Sumer, which they evidently did, but the continuation of the text is badly damaged. Apparently ancient mythology agreed with modern archaeology on the origin of domesticated cereals in the hilly flanks of the Mesopotamian lowlands (Zohary and Hopf 2000: 37, 45, 66).

A contemporary myth makes it clear that the introduction of agriculture was not for the sole benefit of mankind. The people were expected to 'make the fields of the Anunnaki-gods thrive, enlarge the prosperity of the land, perfect the festivals of the gods, and libate cold water (in) the abode of the gods' (Pettinato 1971: 76). Thus Enlil enabled the people to unburden the lesser gods, who previously had to 'carry the basket' and toil for him.

The land thrived, but humanity's uproar disturbed Enlil in his sleep, and he decided to send a flood to wipe it out. 'After the flood had swept over' humanity got a new chance, and it is there that the Royal Chronicle of Lagaš picks up the story with the introduction to its king list (ETCSL 2.1.2). The presence of Ewe and Wheat is presupposed, and the beginning of the text is concerned with the establishment of the proper conditions for successful agriculture, rather than with the introduction of its basic elements:

> An and Enlil had not yet caused kingship (. . .) to come down from Heaven, and Ningirsu had not yet put in place for the countless throng of silent people the spade, the hoe, the basket, or the plough, that which grants life to the land (. . .). Without the ability to carry out the required work, its numbers decreased, decreased greatly (. . .). In the sheepfolds, its sheep and goats died out. At that time water was short at Lagaš, there was famine at Girsu. Canals were not dug, irrigation ditches were not dredged, vast lands were not irrigated by the [shado]of (. . .), because humanity counted on rainwater (. . .). No land was worked or bore fruit. No country or (. . .) people made libations of beer (. . .) to the gods. (After Glassner 2004: 144–149)

The gods put an end to this unsatisfactory situation by providing the people with the missing tools (spade, hoe, basket, and plough) and a king, so that 'after that day they gave all their attention to producing barley'. The kings of the following king list took care of the water supply by digging the necessary canals, and, apparently, of agricultural administration by the introduction of writing.

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The standard later cosmogony can be found in the 'Epic of Creation', then and now called after its first words *Enūma Eliš* 'when above' (Dalley 1991: 228–277; Lambert 2007); its composition is generally dated to the end of the second millennium. After the defeat of primeval Sea (Tiamat/*tâmtu*) and her army of monsters, Marduk, replacing Enlil in cosmogonic mythology, established the actual world, and had mankind created to toil for the gods. Contrary to earlier mythology *Enūma Eliš* shows little interest in food production. There is no creation of Ewe and Wheat or their equivalents, no organization of the land with its productivity in mind. Some of Marduk's fifty names, however, establish his care for the nation's fertility: named Marduk he supplied pasturage and watering; named Asarre he gave arable land, barley and flax; named Enbilulu he kept pasturage and watering in good condition, provided bounty and grain, rained down riches, and supplied abundant vegetation; named Sirsir his hair was a growing crop, his turban a furrow; named Gil he heaped up piles of barley; named Adad he thundered, filled the clouds with his rumble, and gave sustenance to the people below. These names of Marduk originally belonged to distinct older deities, all male, which for the occasion were identified with him.

A late source for Babylonian religion and history is Berossos' *Babyloniaca* (see De Breucker, in this volume). Berossos relates that (in the beginning) there was a 'great crowd of men in Babylonia and they lived without laws just as wild animals'. Then:

> in the first year a beast named Oannes appeared from the Persian Gulf (…), its entire body was that of a fish, but a human head had grown beneath the head of the fish and human feet likewise had grown from the fish's tail, it also had a human voice (…). it gave to the men the knowledge of letters and sciences and crafts of all types. It also taught them how to found cities, establish temples, introduce laws and measure land. It also revealed to them how to plant seeds and then to harvest their fruits; in short it taught men all those things conducive to a settled and civilized life. From the time of that beast nothing further has been discovered (…). Oannes wrote about birth and government and gave the following account to men. (After Burstein 1978: 13–14)

There then follows a version of *Enūma Eliš*, summarized and explained for Berossos' Greek-literate readers.

Berossos' Oannes is identical with the primeval sage Uanna or Uanna-Adapa, known from the cuneiform tradition. Since the longer version of the name can be re-read as the first line of *Enūma Eliš*, written logographically, the ascription of the cosmogonic poem to the ancestor of scribal art probably predated Berossos by several centuries: 'when (U) above (AN) the heavens (AN) did not (NA) yet exist (PA.DA)'. This type of etymological speculation is a typical feature of ancient Mesopotamian scholarship (Hallo 1963: 175–176).

Berossos draws a firm line between people before and after the revelations of Oannes/Uanna: beforehand they were a lawless crowd living like wild animals; afterwards they were civilized. Civilization in his view consisted of the knowledge of writing, sciences, and crafts, the establishment of laws, cities, and cults (temples), and the production of food (sowing and harvesting). The earlier texts cited above are hardly less explicit, but there civilization is thought to have come directly from the gods without the sages'

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intervention: beforehand people were naked and ate grass like sheep; afterwards they were dressed (Ewe, flax), produced grain (Wheat), and ate bread. Agriculture belonged in a package with urbanization, religion, and laws. The possession of that package diachronically distinguished civilized people from primeval man, and synchronically, as we will see, distinguished the Babylonians from their barbarian neighbours and nomadic compatriots (e.g., Wiggermann 1996).

Somewhat older than *Enūma Eliš* is the Plough Myth, also called by modern scholars *The Theogony of Dunnu* (Hallo 1997). The only manuscript is dated palaeographically to the Late Babylonian period (635–330 BC), but the presence of the Hurrian pair Heaven (Hamurnu) and Earth (Hayyašu) points to an origin in the mid-second millennium (1500–1350 BC), when the Hurrian-speaking kingdom of Mittani exercised strong cultural influence on its northern Mesopotamian and Anatolian neighbours. According to Jacobsen (1984) this singular myth reflects the interests of the herdsman, but, as we will see, they are in fact those of the settled food producer.

The incest and parricide in the first part of the Plough Myth recall contemporary Anatolian and later Greek cosmogonies; on the badly damaged reverse the text continues with more traditional Mesopotamian material. The cosmos develops as a sequence of seven divine pairs, each producing its successor pair.

By ploughing, Harab '(Soil-breaking) Plough' and Erṣetu 'Earth' caused Tamtu 'Sea' to be created, while the [fur]rows gave birth to the first animal, Šakkan, a donkey-god responsible for the fertility of the herds. Then '[to (produce)] his (Šakkan's) [f]odder' the two of them built 'Primeval Farmstead' (*dunni ṣâti*).[1] Šakkan mates with Earth, his mother, and also takes Sea, his sister, as wife. Ewe (who, as the son of Šakkan and Sea, is apparently masculine here) mates with Sea, his mother.

Then Gayu the divine herdsman, son of Ewe and Sea, mates with his sister Ida '(Cosmic) River'. A son of Gayu and Ida (whose name is missing) mates with his sister Uyu 'Barley'. Hamurnu 'Heaven', son of […] and Uyu, mates with his sister Belet-ṣeri 'Lady of the Steppe'. Finally, [Hayyašu] 'Earth', son of Hamurnu and Belet-ṣeri, mates with his sister (name missing).

As a whole, the cosmos of this myth is concerned with settled food production: a farmstead, earth, a plough, a river (for irrigation), barley, a herdsman, a ewe, and Šakkan representing the herds. The cosmogony is paralleled by a sequence of calendar dates that progresses through the length of the year. Perhaps the rule and death of each successive pair relates to the dates as a kind of agricultural calendar, but if they do the relationship is not obvious. A fragmentary subscript mentions the 'ploughman's works[ong]', suggesting that it is no coincidence that the cosmos began with ploughing the earth.

[1] The contemporary Akkadian word for farmstead (*dunnu*) can be written with the determinative for cities, which has led to translations of the phrase as 'Dunnu (the city) of yore'. In the first half of the second millennium there were in fact cities called Dunnu in southern Babylonia (Hallo 2000), long ruined when the myth was composed, and of no particular distinction. Clearly a generic 'primeval farmstead' fits the context much better than the name of a relatively obscure city in the south (Wiggermann 2000). I owe the reading Uyu 'Barley' (see below) to M. Stol.

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The organization of space and the synchronic other

The geography of the earlier mythologies is simple: Enlil, dwelling in his central shrine at Nippur, is taken care of by humanity, which has received civilization for that purpose. A representation of such a schematic mental world requires no measurements, and would be relatively easy to make. In fact a mid-third-millennium tablet from Fara (Deimel 1923: no. 76, pl. VIII) has on one side a copy of the best-known Early Dynastic list of professional names, and on the other a drawing that can hardly be anything else than a schematic map of the world (Figure 31.4; Wiggermann 1996: 208–209).

Located in the centre of the map is the cuneiform sign for the Sumerian word *kur* 'mountain', undoubtedly referring to Nippur, where Enlil the 'Great Mountain' lives in his temple 'House Mountain' and determines the fates of his divine and human subjects. Surrounding Enlil and Nippur are four copies of the cuneiform sign for '(irrigated) field'. The sign itself (Figure 31.5) schematically renders a field as it can still be seen today in Mesopotamia, with small canals on either side, and furrows into which the water is led when the field is irrigated. The four 'fields' populate the world around Nippur with farmers

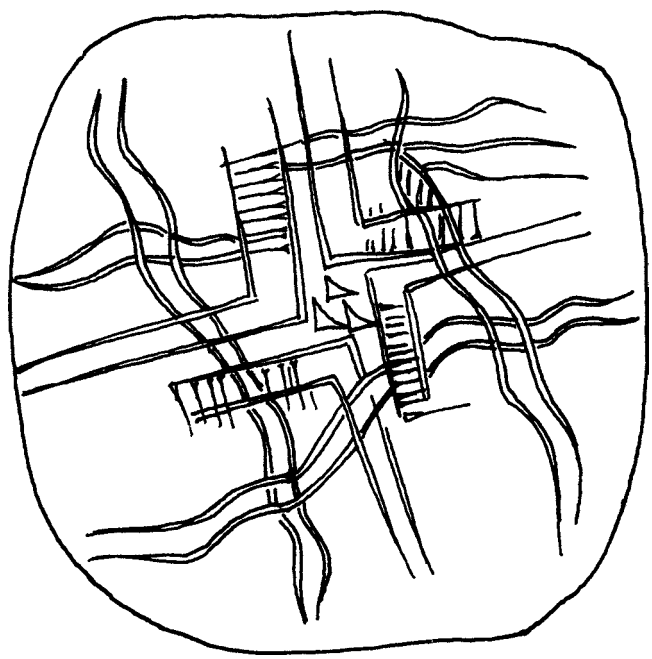

FIGURE 31.4 Clay tablet from mid-third-millennium BC Fara, showing a map of the world. In the centre is the holy city of Nippur (**kur**) (marked with the Sumerian word *kur* 'mountain'), surrounded by irrigated fields and the four streams that define the extent of the inhabited world. (Drawing by F.A.M. Wiggermann, after Deimel 1923: no. 76, pl. VIII)

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FIGURE 31.5 The late fourth-millennium BC cuneiform sign for '(irrigated) field' (Drawing by F.A.M. Wiggermann, after Green and Nissen 1987: 209)

in all four directions, and it is certainly no coincidence that the other side of the tablet lists the professions that define life in urban civilization. The fields take their water from four streams surrounding the settled world, which the languages of Mesopotamia define by naming its borders: the 'Four-Corners-and-Sides' in Sumerian, and the 'Four-Banks' in Akkadian. The map does not specify it, but texts and other images inform us about what existed across the streams in the emptiness beyond civilization: wild animals, primeval monsters, demons, drifting souls, and nomads—the other and the enemy (Wiggermann 1996). The primeval ocean beyond the borders of the tablet is left to the imagination.

This early map can be contrasted with a more detailed but still schematic late first-millennium document (Horowitz 1998: 20–42), one side of which shows a map of the settled world encircled by an ocean, and the other a description of the eerie zone beyond. The map is on the whole realistic, with cities like Babylon, Aššur, and Der located approximately correctly, mountains in the north, and swamps in the south. The description on the reverse specifies some of the dead, wild, and monstrous inhabitants of the outer regions. As is typical for the first millennium, farmers and farming have dropped below the horizon of the map-maker.

Mythology defines imaginary reality as well as a map, or better. The image of the world encountered in the Sumerian myth *Enki and the World Order* (ETCSL 1.1.3; Averbeck 2003a; 2003b) is much more detailed than that of the somewhat older third-millennium map. In the myth, Enki, commissioned by Enlil in Nippur, travels through Sumer in a barge, assigning specific deities to take charge of various regions and functions, most of them related to food production.

Enki, literally 'Lord of the Earth', was the god of rivers and streams at home in Eridu, where he guarded the *me*, the sacred rules that kept god, man, and nature on track; his boatman was the vegetation-god Sirsir the 'Slithering One', who recurs in *Enūma Eliš* as one of the gods identified with Marduk. The expected result of Enki's organizing effort is an abundance of water, the fertility of herds and fields, and the peaceful co-existence of city-states; Enki brings prosperity to perfection, Enlil rules the land and enjoys the fruits.

The myth then relates that Enki filled the bed of the Tigris with life-giving water by ejaculating; the Euphrates was already there. Enbilulu, literally 'Lord Rushes', a vegetation-god also identified with Marduk in *Enūma Eliš*, gets the title 'inspector of streams', and is charged with maintaining the river system as a whole. As a result the irrigated fields produce barley for human and divine consumption.

The next section treats the lagoons, marshes, and reedbeds downstream in the south, which produce fish and water fowl; the name of the deity in charge is not preserved. Further south are the gulf and its inland extensions, under the charge of Enki's daughter Nanše, the 'fisheries inspector of the sea'.

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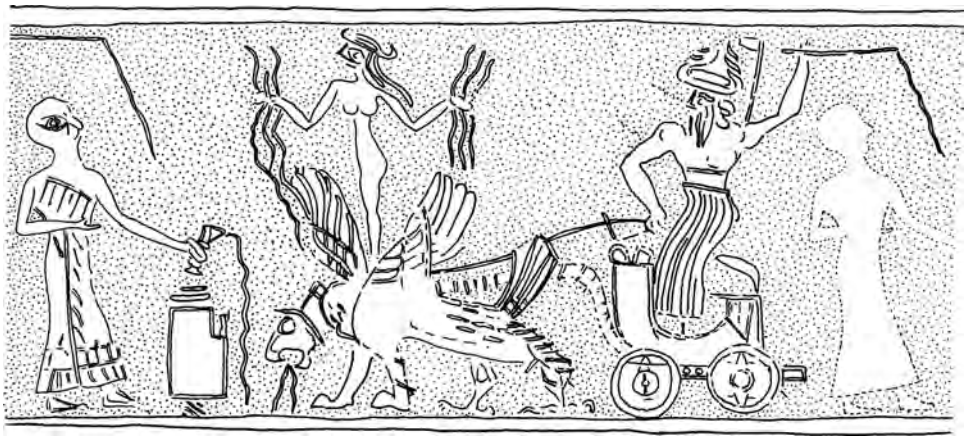

FIGURE 31.6 Impression of a cylinder seal, second half of the third millennium BC, showing the thunder-god Iškur on his chariot, cracking a whip, and his naked wife, Šala, on a storm demon (the lion-dragon), showering rain. (Drawing by F.A.M. Wiggermann, after Boehmer 1965: Figure 373).

Although rainfall in Sumer was much less important than irrigation, the myth finds a place for the thunder-god Iškur, 'who rides the storms' (Figure 31.6). As 'canal inspector of Heaven and Earth' he waters the higher grounds ('tells') that are not reached by irrigation canals. The complementarity of the 'twins' Enki/Ea and Iškur/Adad for the life of the land is made explicit by a second-millennium Akkadian myth (Schwemer 2001: 169):

> Ea of the sources, Adad of Heaven,
> Who could gu[ide] the people better than they?
> The sources produce prosperity for the nation,
> The flood of the streams [a multitude of] carps;
> Adad rains down on the people a rain of plenty,
> Ea added abundantly bearing fields […].

Once the water supply is secured, Enki turns his interest to the fields. He 'organized ploughs, yokes, and teams (…), bestowed the horned oxen, (…) opened up the holy furrows, and made the barley grow on the cultivated fields'. In charge of them he puts Enlil's farmer, Enkimdu, responsible for 'dykes and irrigation ditches'. The goddess Wheat, the 'good bread of the whole world', gets grain and chickpeas under her care. That the Sumerians valued her fundamental contribution appears from her epithet: 'the strength of the land, the life of the black-headed (Sumerians)'.

After a section devoted to brick-making and building the text continues with animal life on the steppe: Šakkan, the 'king of the hills', is put in charge of wild goats and sheep, and Inana's husband, Dumuzi, gets the herds of domesticated animals. Finally Enki 'fixed boundaries' and charged the sun-god Utu with keeping peace between the city-states. The measuring of land and the administration of its produce is put in charge of the grain-goddess Nisaba, the patron deity of scribes. The only conspicuous omission is the date palm (Lambert 1999: 357).

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Overall it is clear that food production is not the preserve of a few isolated gods, but a cooperative venture by a large section of the pantheon, supervised by Enlil and Enki. The world organized by the gods is an idealized projection of the reality that the Sumerians lived in, a permanent divine structure sanctioning the actual social order, with its farmers, canal inspectors, judges, and scribes all geared to the service of a central power—in the myth Enlil, in reality his self-styled servant, the king.

The Mesopotamian farmers lived in or near cities, the nomadic shepherds in the dry steppe unfit for agriculture. In *Enki and the World Order* the god Enki provided the Sumerians with the essentials of urban civilization: agriculture, a scribe, and various other specialists, among them the brick-god Kulla and the divine architect Mušdama. The Amorite nomads, on the other hand, 'those who have no city, those who have no houses', were presented with steppe animals for their livelihood.

The contrasting identities of settled farmer and (more or less) homeless nomad are specified further in another Sumerian myth, *The Marriage of Martu*, in which the Amorites, called *martu* in Sumerian, are represented by the eponymous god Martu (ETCSL 1.7.1; Klein 1997; Vanstiphout 2000). Martu, attending a festival in the city of Ilab (or Ninab), wins the city god's daughter in marriage after a wrestling match. The girl apparently discusses the upcoming marriage with her friends, and one of them comments on the lifestyle of the future bridegroom. Implicitly or explicitly, her comments contrast the barbarian ways of the Martu-nomads with those of a civilized city girl like her. His kind roams about in the mountains, eating truffles, raw flesh, and whatever god forbids; having no permanent home, the nomads live in tents, do not bury their dead, and are without temples or religion; they are clothed in sheepskins, stu[pid], agg[ressive], destructive, looking like [monkeys(?)]. The bride-to-be, however, ignores her friend's judgements and marries the stranger anyhow. Here the story ends, but presumably Martu and his bride settled down, built a house (temple), and started a family. A comparable tale is told about the wild man Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgameš*, who through the love of a woman gets acquainted with the ways of the city, or the products of Ewe and Barley: clothing, beer, and bread (George 2003: 172–192). Such stories reveal that it was considered possible to assume a Sumerian identity and become a citizen.

The image of the synchronic or geographical other (nomads, ghosts, monsters) parallels that of the diachronic or historical one (primeval cosmos, demons, men living like beasts). In both cases the distinction between own and other lies in the possession of agriculture and the concomitant civilization (cities, cults, laws, dress, bread, beer).

Dying gods

It has been argued that the city gods' involvement in the food production of their domains led to the gods' characters being adapted to the ecological potential of their respective habitats, whereby the deities of neighbouring domains tended to become related as family members (Jacobsen 1970; Edzard 2004: 575–578). The gods can

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be grouped as: those of the southeastern marshes (e.g. Enki and his daughter Nanše) associated with fish, birds, and reeds; those of the southern orchards along the waterways associated (among others) with dates; those of the herding regions (e.g. Nanna, his son Utu, his daughter Inana, her husband Dumuzi) associated with cows and sheep; and those of the farming regions (e.g. Enlil, his wife Ninlil, their son Ninurta/Ningirsu, Nisaba) associated with cereals. However, this theory may create 'more system than really existed' (Lambert 1999: 355–356), and in any case besides these possible later accretions the gods retained their original characters (Nanna as the moon, Utu as the sun, etc.).

One group of gods, those of the southern orchards, can be defined more closely as a group of dying and resurrecting gods of vegetation (Wiggermann 1997; Mettinger 2001). As already observed by Jacobsen (1970: 23–24) all gods of this group were netherworld gods with a close relationship to trees and vegetation. The plough is among their attributes, proving a connection with the yearly cycle of cereal production, a step beyond mere trees and vegetation. Their cults extended east of the Tigris (in Ešnunna, Der, Elam), whence probably the association with snakes and dragons that stressed their underworld nature. In the Sumerian lamentation *In the Desert by the Early Grass* a number of third-millennium cults concerning dying gods of various origin coalesced into a barely integrated whole (Cohen 1988: 668–703). Among the different dying figures bewailed in this composition are not only Dumuzi and the dead kings that once embodied him as Inana's spouse, but also a number of snake-gods.

The leading gods of this group are Ninazu, literally 'Lord Healer', and his son Ningišzida, literally 'Lord of the True Tree'. Ninazu, who together with his brother Ninmada, the 'snake-charmer of An', was thought to have brought the first grain to Sumer, was the 'king of the snakes' and the original master of the dragon Sumerian/ *mušhuš* Akkadian/ *mušhuššu*

FIGURE 31.7 Impression of a cylinder seal, second half of the third millennium BC, showing the netherworld god Ninazu on his snake-dragon 'Dreadful Snake', holding a plough. (Drawing by F.A.M. Wiggermann, after Amiet 1955: pl. V, no. 4)

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'Dreadful Snake' (Figure 31.7). In Ur during the Ur III period the festivals in his honour fell in the summer months, and undoubtedly related to the death of vegetation during that period (Cohen 1996: 18). Ningišzida was less clearly tied to the calendar, although a litany associates him with August (Cohen 1993: 320).

During the first half of the second millennium the whole group of dying and resurrecting gods became extinct, together with the rest of religious interest in agriculture. Only Dumuzi survived into the first millennium, but perhaps not as a god of vegetation. Wailing rites for the 'capture' and death of Dumuzi were still popular, but without a regular temple cult.

The texts are not very explicit about Dumuzi's resurrection (Frahm 2003), but the theme occurs in a tolerably clear form on a third-millennium seal (Figure 31.8). A figure, marked as divine by the grain growing from his body and as a lesser god by the missing horned crown, is approaching a vegetation-goddess, while a second scene shows a worshipper carrying a kid and approaching Inana. The minor vegetation-god is wearing a lion's skin, the same dress Gilgameš was wearing when he roamed the steppe, and he is evidently returning from a sojourn in the wilds. His weapons suit the dangerous surroundings, and the goat indicates his interest in shepherding. What the rustically clad god returns to with his stalks is the world of settled gods, the city, where they receive visitors in their temples. Since steppe and netherworld are one and the same in mythological contexts, the once absent and now returning vegetation-god can be recognized as one dying and resurrecting. As a minor god roaming the steppe and interested in sheep he must be the shepherd Dumuzi, an identity reinforced by the presence of Inana. The vegetation-goddess would be Nisaba or Ezina, hailing the resurrected god and the return of the growing season (Wiggermann 2010).

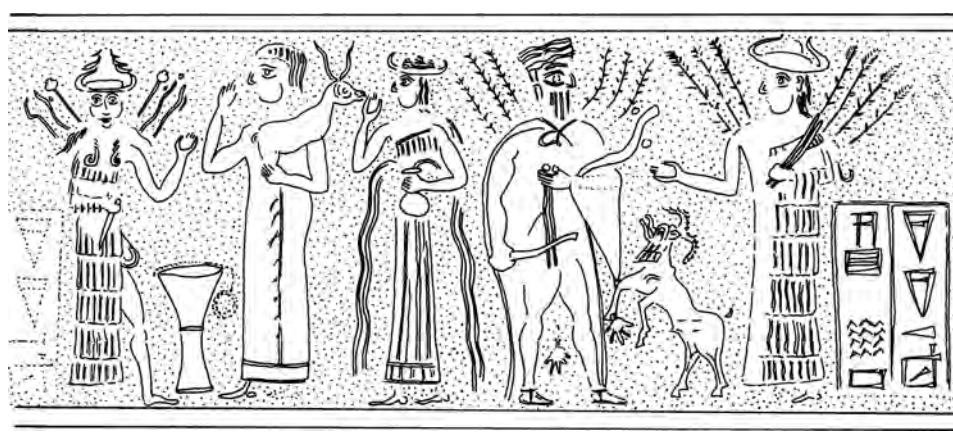

FIGURE 31.8 Impression of a cylinder seal, second half of the third millennium BC, showing the vegetation-god Dumuzi returning from the steppe (death) to civilization (life). (Drawing by F.A.M. Wiggermann, after Collon 1982: Figure 213)

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Yearly festivals and occasional rites

The Mesopotamians had a lunar year of twelve months comprising 354 days, about eleven days short of an average solar year. The short lunar year was harmonized with the solar year and the agricultural cycle by intercalating an extra first, sixth or twelfth month at irregular intervals (see Steele in this volume). Literary and lexical texts divide the agricultural year into two, or rarely four, seasons: as autumn/winter (October–March, with 'frost', 'ice', and 'snow') and spring/summer (April–September, with 'harvest' and 'heat'), or as 'time of sowing' (autumn), 'cold' (winter), 'time of harvest' (spring), and 'time of wet land' (summer) (Hruška 1993). Winter was the growing season; the hot and dry summer, when all vegetation withers and dies, was used to prepare the scorched fields for sowing and the next winter's growing season, and for the planting of summer crops such as sesame. The harvest, the culmination of the agricultural year, was the 'Great Festival of Enlil' (Sallaberger 1999b: 385).

Ideally the division of time depended on the cooperation of the moon-god Nanna/Sin, the sun-god Utu/Šamaš, and the constellations (*Enūma Eliš* V 1–46), but in practice it was basically Nanna/Sin who was responsible, rarely joined by Utu/Šamaš and usually supervised by the leading god of the pantheon, Enlil, or later Marduk (Lambert 2006: 239–240). On one occasion it is Enbilulu, the 'canal inspector of heaven and earth', who 'completes (the creation of) day, month, and year', which may or may not have something to do with irrigation (Lambert 2006: 238), his basic task.

The yearly agricultural festivals took place on dates fixed by the lunar calendar, which means that they could lag a month or more behind the actual agricultural activities determined by the seasons and the solar year; incidental weather conditions aggravated the disjunction between the ideal (the cultic year) and the facts.

Evidence for the cultic calendar is limited both in quantity and in quality. Much is known about the Ur III period, but the texts are administrative, and concern expenditures for offerings, not the meaning of the rituals; moreover, each major town had its own cultic calendar, and the differences are considerable (Cohen 1993; 1996; Sallaberger 1993; 1999a).

The standard Mesopotamian calendar was created in the Old Babylonian period on the basis of the earlier calendar of Nippur. Learned library texts offer a variety of facts and fiction on the nature and meaning of its periodical rites, but they are hard to date and of dubious relevance for the actual practice of any one specific period (Cohen 1993; Reynolds 1996). The most important are the ominous calendars or menologies (Livingstone 1999), among them a (late) second-millennium bilingual text now called Astrolabe B, which relates month names to constellations, gods, rituals, and agricultural activities (Horowitz 1998: 154–168). Other first-millennium material interprets items of the Nippur calendar on the basis of an early and imperfectly known mythology centring on Enlil and his primeval challengers Anzu and Enmešarra (Civil 1974–77; Jacobsen 1975), but has little interest in the underlying agricultural cycle (e.g. George 2006). Like

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those of Ur III the Neo- and Late Babylonian administrative texts are concerned with practical matters (e.g. Beaulieu 1993; 2003). In as far as is known the periodical rituals of the late period had no relation to the agricultural cycle (Linssen 2004).

The new year started in spring (Month I). In the Ur III period the capital Ur had two *akītu* festivals, one celebrating the beginning of the harvest season (Month I), and one celebrating the beginning of the sowing season (Month VII). Both occasions were observed in other towns too, but the dates differed widely. The harvest *akītu* in Ur involved the offering of first fruits to Nanna, a symbolic expression of the ultimate purpose of the agricultural effort: to feed the gods. It seems that with the sowing festival in the capital sowing started nationwide; the seeder plough received special attention during the rituals, and the king himself handled it, embodying 'Enlil's chief farmer', Ninurta. In the fields the ploughmen were served beer, and *The Debate between Hoe and Plough* was performed (Civil 1968: 4; ETCSL 5.3.1). It is won by the humble hoe—a recognition of the humble field worker. In Nippur two further festivals took place, one celebrating the beginning of the spring flood brought about by Ninurta (Month II), and one the end of the sowing season when the plough-teams were disbanded (Month VIII). The gods that received offerings during these festivals were the heads of the local and national pantheon, rather than the specialized gods of agriculture; rare exceptions concern the snake-god Irhan (at Ur), and the grain-goddesses Nisaba and Ezina (in Umma).

Astrolabe B adds a number of details of uncertain date. In the first month (April) the king is (re)installed, which accords with what is known about the first-millennium New Year's festival in Babylonia, when Marduk celebrated the beginning of his rule and reinstalled the king in office. The month of the spring flood (May), when the oxen are harnessed and the ground is broken, is the month of Ningirsu (here a name of Ninurta), the 'chief farmer of Enlil'. The death of Dumuzi occurred at the beginning of the hot season, in the month named after him Du'uzu (July) (Edzard 2004: 576–577). Festivals for the dead were celebrated in August (Month V), and for the primeval ancestors of Enlil in October (Month VII). Month VIII (November), in the rainy period, was the month of Iškur/Adad, the 'canal inspector of Heaven and Earth'.

Vegetation-goddesses are frequent on third-millennium seals (Braun-Holzinger 1998–2001), and one of them survived into the first as Iškur/Adad's wife Šala or Medimsa, literally 'She with the Beautiful Limbs'—the attractiveness of the grain-goddess is a recurring theme in the texts. In the Sargonic period and later she was the god's naked companion, standing on his lion-dragon or bull and spreading her dress to bring rain and reveal her beautiful body (see Figure 31.6; Otto 1998). A second-millennium astrological source explains that 'the star Raven (Corvus) is the star of Adad, the constellation Furrow (Virgo) is Šala who is the ear of barley (Spica)' (Hunger and Pingree 1989: 32–33), and a late first-millennium tablet with drawings of stars and constellations shows Corvus as a raven and Virgo (Furrow) as a goddess (Šala) holding an ear of barley (Weidner 1927: pl. V no. 3).

A ninth-century Assyrian seal (Figure 31.9) has two registers, the lower one representing reality on earth, the upper one its imaginary counterpart in heaven. Below on earth two men are ploughing and sowing and above Adad offers ears of barley to his wife,

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Šala, while a dove, the messenger of love, mediates between the two deities (Osten-Sacken 1999). The act of ploughing is regularly described in sexual metaphors (Jacobsen 1982: 23), and it is the sexual union of Adad (rain) and Šala (furrow) that produces the grain. Adad—in the world of the gods—is the ultimate beneficiary of the human agricultural effort, and in the form of his symbolic bull he is shown being fed in the upper register. The seven dots between the two deities represent the Pleiades, and they are there for a reason. According to Astrolabe B, 'Ayyaru (May) (is the month of) the Pleiades, the Seven; the oxen are yoked, the wet grounds are opened, the ploughs are washed; the month of the warrior Ningirsu, the chief farmer of Enlil'. On the seal Adad takes the place of the earlier Ningirsu.

The disjunction between the lunar and solar calendars, and the widely varying dates of the agricultural festivals in the various cities exclude the possibility that the cultic calendar served as a practical guideline for actual field work. It is possible that the

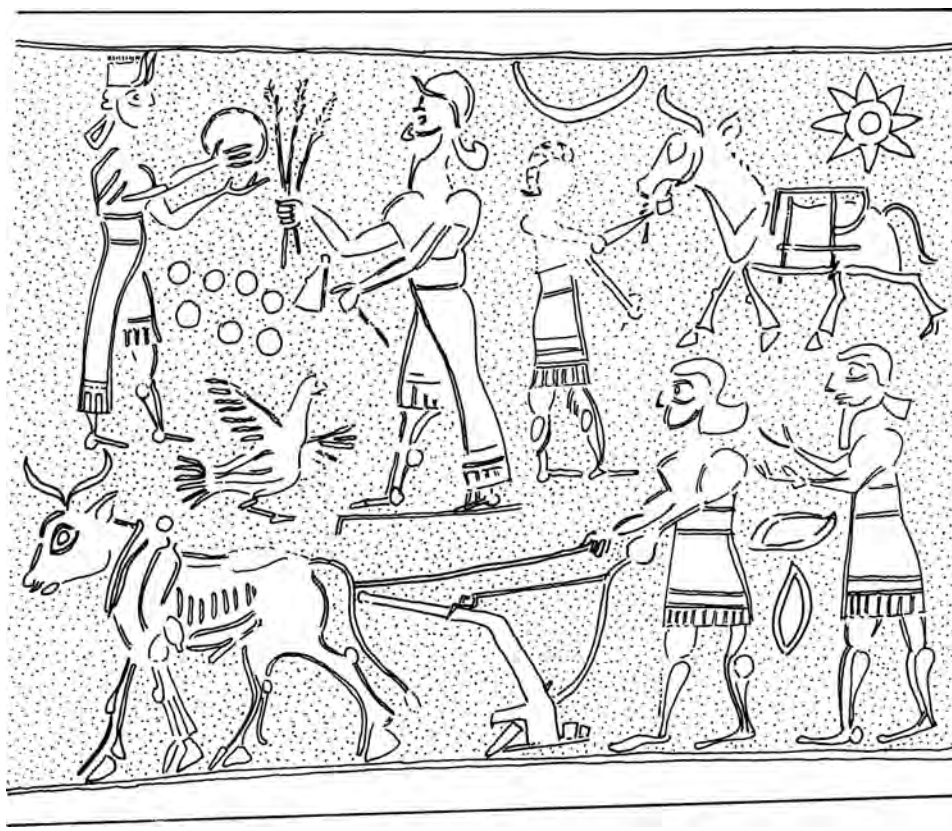

FIGURE 31.9 Impression of a cylinder seal, first half of the first millennium BC, showing two men ploughing and sowing, and the thunder-god Adad offering ears of barley to his wife, Šala; a dove, the messenger of love, mediates between the two deities. (Drawing by F.A.M. Wiggermann, after Keel and Uehlinger 1990: 24, Figure 13)

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constellations linked to the months in Astrolabe B constituted a sidereal calendar that served this purpose, but the authorities do not agree (Brown 2000: 115, 246; Horowitz 1998: 154–168). Observation of the stars to determine the right time is attested in *The Farmer's Instructions* (Civil 1994: 30, l. 38), and the grain-goddess Nisaba owned and consulted a lapis lazuli tablet inscribed with the constellations, which probably owed its existence to her agricultural interests (Horowitz 1998: 165–168). In a hymn where the goddess Nanše plays the part of Nisaba she is called 'the loved one of the stars, the signs for cultivation' (Lambert 1967: 118, l. 37).

Besides periodical festivals loosely synchronized with reality the Ur III sources indicate the existence of rites accompanying actual field work: against excessive floods and rain storms brought about by the thunder-god Iškur (Schwemer 2001; Wilcke 1999); for the plough at the beginning of ploughing; for the fields after sowing and before harvesting, and at threshing time (e.g. Schwemer 2001: 679). The (early) Old Babylonian *Farmer's Instructions* prescribes the performance of four rites: 'after the seedlings break open the ground' for the goddess Ninkilim (against field pests); after harvesting; before threshing; and after threshing (Maeda 1979; Civil 1994: 92). Certain irrigation activities too were accompanied by religious ceremonies (Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2002: 5–6).

Demons embodied civilization's fear of disturbances of the precarious order, bringing death, disease, and disaster. Alone or in groups these anti-social elements came forth like a flood and overwhelmed the settled lands: 'on the cultivated fields they cry out malevolently, and drown the life of the land (i.e. the crop), they are the ones (…) who malevolently level cities, settlements, and sprawling villages' (Geller 2007: 166, ll. 16–18). Their ultimate goal was the individual Mesopotamian, for whose benefit the exorcisms with such descriptions were composed. An Ur III exorcistic ritual was designated as 'binding the fields'; it involved the use of ropes and bundles of reed, but its purpose is not exactly clear (Cavigneaux and Al-Rawi 2002: 4, 36). Rituals known from later sources were directed against field pests, plant or animal diseases, and the consequences for field and garden of unfavourable omens (e.g. Finkel 1998; George 1999). Rodents and other small field pests could be demonized as 'the dogs of Ninkilim', the latter a mongoose-god and 'master of the animals' expected to keep his minions at bay with the assistance of Adad, Amurru, and the Four Winds. Human guards were stationed in the fields to protect seedlings and harvest against all kinds of other noxious animals: locusts, birds, gazelles, wild oxen, and onagers (e.g. Heimpel 1996; Wassermann 1999).

Conclusions

Agriculture was hierarchically organized for the benefit of the gods, with Enlil (later Marduk) and his chief farmer Ninurta (also known as Ningirsu) at the top, then the various city gods, and finally the king giving guidance to his subjects, the people actually working in the fields. Presumably this hierarchy was brought about by successive political reorganizations involving first the cities and the city rulers (installation of city gods),

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then the regional king and the land (installation of central shrine in Nippur). The lower gods of the historical hierarchy might stem from a more primitive pre-state religious repertoire: the two similar vegetation-goddesses Nisaba and Ezina/Ašnan, the ewe-goddess Lahar, and the donkey-god Šakkan representing the fertility of the herds. Be that as it may, except for Nisaba they were and remained the passive and speechless objects of manipulation by higher gods. In the first millennium the earlier divine committee was replaced by the autocrats Marduk or Aššur, neither of whom showed much interest in fertility or farming.

The history of Nisaba (Michalowski 1998–2001) may serve to summarize the fate of agriculture in cuneiform culture. In the third millennium she was an important goddess, patron of writing, accounting, and surveying, a string of qualities that describe organized agricultural production, and which must derive from her nature as a grain-goddess. In fact a school text composed in honour of the goddess associates the introduction of writing with successful agriculture (the Royal Chronicle of Lagaš, l. 107, ETCSL 2.1.2). In the first millennium the god Nabu had taken her place as patron of writing, and served the divine state from the centre rather than from the fields. Apparently the scribes, now scholars and sages, had shed female patronage, removed agriculture from the pedigree of their profession, and firmly relocated themselves in the urban heart of the state. Meanwhile, and until the introduction of tractors and motor pumps, work in the fields continued as usual.

Further reading

Owing to the wealth of new and as yet undigested archaeological and philological information, an up-to-date monograph on food production is not available at the moment, but Salonen (1968) is still useful, especially in conjunction with Civil (1994) and the studies of Hruška (1985a; 1985b; 1988a; 1988b; 1990; 1993; 1994a; 1994b; 1995a; 1995b; 1999; 2003–05). A brief but densely packed survey is given by Butz (1983).

Most books on the history and civilization of ancient Mesopotamia contain chapters or paragraphs devoted to agriculture and its environmental and social conditions (e.g. Meissner (1920–25: 184–227); Postgate (1994: 157–190); Soden (1985: 87–103)); the most detailed treatment, with an extensive bibliography, is Potts (1997: 1–42 (environment), and 56–90 (agriculture and diet)). Useful collections of papers on a broad array of subjects can be found in Klengel and Renger (1999), the *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture*, vols. 1–8 (1984–95), and the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (note particularly: Getreide, Haustiere, Kamel, Kanalisation, Leinen, Linsen, Milchprodukte, Nomaden, Obst und Gemüse, Öl, Pferd, Pflug, Rind).

Archaeological studies (short bibliography Nissen (1999: 188–189)) tend to concentrate on the dynamic relation between the environment, food production, sedentism, and pastoralism: Adams (1981: 1–26) (water, climate, vegetation in southern Mesopotamia), Buringh (1957) (living conditions in southern Mesopotamia), Cauvin (2000) (prehistoric origins), Eyre (1995) (agricultural cycle), Hesse (1995) (animal husbandry and diet), Schwartz (1995) (nomadism), and Watkins (2005) (prehistoric origins). Philological studies (short bibliography Foster

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(1999)) tend to follow the bulk of the written sources and concentrate on the administrative and economic aspects of food production: see the diachronic surveys of Renger (1995) (ownership of land), Renger (2002) (organization), and Driel (1998; 2000) (land use and ownership).

In the future there is still much to be learned from a systematic comparison with the (early) modern Near East—see especially Wirth (1962) (southern Mesopotamia) and Wirth (1971) (northern Mesopotamia), and further: Abdalla (2005) (agricultural year of northern Mesopotamia), Baali (1966) (land), Buringh (1960) (soils, rivers), Charles (1990) (crop husbandry), Guest (1966) (flora), Hatt (1959) (mammals), Hooper and Field (1937) (plants and drugs), Khalaf (1961) (fishes), Kühne (1991) (northern Mesopotamia), Mahdi (1961) (fishes), and Willcox (1987) (trees and shrubs).

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CHAPTER 32

SOURCING, ORGANIZING, AND ADMINISTERING MEDICINAL INGREDIENTS

BARBARA BÖCK

Cuneiform culture produced a substantial quantity of medical recipes and a smaller number of pharmacological handbooks that give detailed information about the materials employed in healing. Both medicine and pharmacology were strongly bound to tradition: as is conventionally assumed for literary texts and most genres of scholarly and scientific literature, they were meant to be preserved and passed on to later generations. Thus intellectual endeavour focused on copying, re-editing, abridging, and enlarging textual materials. The process of forming and handing down a rather consistent corpus has been called ancient Mesopotamia's 'stream of tradition', (Oppenheim 1977: 18; cf. Robson in this volume). It seems that for some text genres this 'stream of tradition' broke up in several directions, developing into separate traditions. As far as the medical and the pharmacological corpora are concerned, however, variations only can be observed only in the arrangement of handbooks and recipe collections (Köcher 1978). Although there are subtle changes in the drug terminology, the virtue of traditionalism seems to have impeded new developments in pharmacology or changes in ancient attitudes towards medicine.

Medical recipes

As medical prescriptions are the largest source for medical ingredients—roughly estimated there are some 5000 of them—they form a convenient starting point. Already in the oldest written prescriptions medical knowledge appears fully developed. The oldest known text comes from Ebla, dating to the mid-third millennium BC (Fronzaroli 1998). Two unprovenanced tablets of Sumerian medical prescriptions come from the

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end of the third millennium BC (Civil 1960; 1961) but the overwhelming majority of the corpus is in the Akkadian language. The oldest of these are from the beginning of the second millennium while the latest date to the 4th–3rd centuries. The textual transmission of medical knowledge is inconsistent: there are only a few texts dating to the beginning of the second millennium; most of them have been unearthed in the ancient city of Ur (Finkel 2004). It seems that the systematic recording and compiling of medical literature began some time after the middle of the second millennium. The large majority of the surviving evidence comes from the first millennium. Foremost are tablets from the libraries of Assurbanipal and his father Esarhaddon at 7th-century Nineveh, who created a royal library and reference collection of scholarly works (Lieberman 1990; George and Frame 2005); other important findspots include temple and private libraries and tablet hoards found outside buildings in other Neo-Assyrian cities such as Assur, Kalhu, and Huzirina—as well as Sippar, Babylon, and Uruk from 6th–3rd-century Babylonia.

The cuneiform recipe literature is the tangible evidence that ancient Mesopotamian practitioners were competent in curing diseases and other complaints, as evident from phrases, usually at the conclusion of a prescription, such as 'he will recover.' Indeed, the sheer mass of recipes, sometimes accompanied by rituals, gives the impression that diseases could be successfully combated. Characteristic of the recipe literature is the successive listing of multiple prescriptions for the same ailment, which apparently demonstrated that a variety of treatments were considered to be equally efficacious.

The following example is taken from the first-millennium handbook of medical prescriptions kept at Nineveh. The passage is from the first tablet of the section on diseases of the gastrointestinal tract which contains extra serial prescriptions:

> If a man suffers from mucous obstructions (of the airways) and it turns into an illness which is accompanied by colic: root of *pillû*-plant, root from liquorice, *tarmuš*-plant, the plants with the descriptive names 'it-combated-1000' and 'it-combated-20', *tulla*-plant, *šakirû*-plant. Crush these seven drugs together, give them to beer, keep it overnight under a starry sky. On the following morning (the patient) should repeatedly drink it on an empty stomach, then he will recover. (…) If *ditto*, crush salt, (the patient) should repeatedly drink it in water on an empty stomach, then he will recover. If *ditto*, crush *amanum*-salt, (the patient) should repeatedly drink it on an empty stomach, then he will recover. (After Köcher 1980: 574, i 1–3, 9–10)

The colophon displays one of the typical subscripts of the Ninevite medical tablets:

> First tablet of 'If a man suffers from mucous obstructions (of the airways) and it turns into an illness which is accompanied by colic'. Palace of Assurbanipal, king of the universe, king of the land of Assur, whom Nabu and Tašmetu gave wide-open ears, who was given profound insight: the finest of the scribal art—among my royal predecessors no one had learned this discipline. Prescriptions from head to toe-nail—extra serial excerpts. I wrote down on tablets, checked and collated the learned recommendations, the healing proficiency of the gods Ninurta and Gula, as extensive as it is, and for my contemplation and recital I deposited them in my palace. (after Köcher 1980: 574, iv 52–59).

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Lists of plants and medicinal ingredients

The other important source for ancient Mesopotamian materia medica is the corpus of pharmacological texts (for an overview see Stol 2004–05; Böck forthcoming). Compared to the transmission of medical literature for over 1500 years, pharmacological texts were copied and edited only for about 800 years. The earliest pharmacological texts preserved come from Assur and date to the last third of the second millennium BC. Again, we observe that most manuscripts come from Assurbanipal's library at Nineveh. He even claims to have issued a new edition of the plant lexicon Uruanna = *maštakal* (Figure 32.1), as the colophons of some of the preserved chapters shows.

> First/third/tenth/twelfth part of the handbook Uruanna = *maštakal*. It contains drugs, which since times of old have not been systematically redacted in commentaries and explanatory texts. Assurbanipal, king of the universe and king of Assyria, checked all those drugs and their equivalents that had been indiscriminately lumped

FIGURE 32.1 Neo-Assyrian tablet, with chapter 3 of Uruanna = *maštakal*, the handbook of medicinal plants: from the library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh (British Museum, K 4345+). (Photo by Frans van Koppen. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

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> together without applying any criterion as far as the sequence is concerned and for the first time he methodically arranged these drugs and their equivalents. He removed those entries that appeared two or three times. In doing so he did not change the old handbooks but rather followed their old order of entries, then checked and collated them. (Hunger 1968: 98–99; note that the list of texts quoted is not complete)

Another important findspot for pharmacological texts is Assur while further texts have been unearthed at Huzirina, Kalhu, Sippar, and Babylon dating from the 8th to 4th centuries BC. Unlike the medical recipes, cuneiform texts about pharmacology are heterogeneous in content and style. In dealing with this corpus it is sensible to differentiate between three sub-genres: texts concerned with nomenclature and lexicographical issues; descriptions of plants; and herbals that correlate medicinal plants with diseases or complaints which they alleviate (Böck forthcoming).

It seems that issues of nomenclature, orthography, and synonymy played an unusually important role in cuneiform pharmacology, since one of the best-documented sources is a lexicon of drug terms, especially drugs of vegetable origin, which is named after its opening line 'Uruanna = *maštakal*.' In its final stage this lexicon recorded up to eight synonymous drugs, one or more substitute plants, and included terms for the same plant in languages such as Kassite, Elamite, Hurrian, and Aramaic. Uruanna contains about 1300 terms referring to drugs of vegetable origin, which, taking into account orthographic variants and synonyms, can be cautiously reduced to 340 different plants (Böck forthcoming). In order to illustrate the structure of the lexicon the first lines are quoted and briefly commented on:

Plant whose place is in heaven—*maštakal*-plant.
Plant from the mountain—*maštakal*-plant.
Inuš-plant—*maštakal*-plant.
Tulla-plant—*maštakal*-plant.
Root from *tulla*-plant—*maštakal*-plant.
Pure plant—*maštakal*-plant.
Plant for purification—*maštakal*-plant.

The first term of each entry given is usually written in Sumerian logograms. The lexicon opens with one of the plants that were used to achieve ritual purification, which was indispensable before treating the sick. The second entry probably refers to one of the habitats of *maštakal*, namely the northeastern mountain region of Mesopotamia. The following two terms, *inuš* and *tulla*, are substitute plants and not different names for *maštakal* since they both appear listed together with *maštakal* in medical prescriptions. The 'pure plant' is a well-known epithet of *maštakal*, attested mainly in literary or incantation texts.

In order to better understand Babylonian and Assyrian taxonomy, it is necessary to briefly analyse the pattern of plant terms. Akkadian plant names use two patterns. Most typical are one-part names comprising nouns, sometimes further specified with an adjective, such as the term *illuru* 'blossom (plant)' or *illuru peṣû* 'white blossom (plant)'.

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Less common are two-word names; they are usually formed as genitive constructions. The first term in the genitive construction can refer to the Akkadian term for drug in general, *šammu*, and the second term to the name of a disease or part of the body, so 'drug for jaundice' or 'drug for the hips'.

Within this group of binary names some stand out whose first terms are body parts, fluids, some or products to which names for animals or humans are attached; for example, 'dragon's blood', 'semen of mankind', 'bones of mankind', or 'dove's excrement'. Since a significant number of ingredients with this name pattern are equated with plant terms, there is no doubt as to the origin and nature of these ingredients. It has been put forward that the names contained riddles and served as secret names or code names for plants (Köcher 1995: 211; Kinnier Wilson 2005). It is significant that these terms in Uruanna are conspicuously separated from the main chapters and grouped together in a section of their own. There was even an independently transmitted explanatory text on plant terminology, which consists exclusively of names like this. The spatial separation of one-part and two-part names that have a transparent meaning from the opaque two-part names clearly indicates that ancient Mesopotamian scholars distinguished between these two groups. Coded names occur frequently in medical texts; occasionally they are mentioned as specific—that is as sole ingredients in a recipe. Sometimes the ancient scribes also added in the prescriptions the decoded name, as is the case in the following example, which comes from the tablet already quoted—namely, 'If a man suffers from mucous obstructions (of the airways) and it turns into an illness which is accompanied by colic':

> If *ditto*, (the patient) should drink on an empty stomach dried 'meat of a mongoose,' then he will recover. Explanation: If *ditto*, (the patient) should drink on an empty stomach water with root of liquorice, then he will recover. (After Köcher 1980: no. 574, i 8)

The name 'meat of a mongoose' is the coded name for liquorice root. Coded names also appear in magical–medical texts ranging from rituals that aim to transfer the disease to some other entity to sympathetic magic and other magical procedures.

Descriptive data about drugs, primarily of vegetable origin, were obviously useful for helping practitioners to recognize and collect medicinal plants and to avoid poisonous or noxious plants. Our main source for plant descriptions is the manual known in antiquity under the title *Šammu Šikinšu*, 'the appearance of the medicinal drug'. The manual cannot be fully reconstructed on the basis of the surviving tablets. So far, only one description of a poisonous plant is attested:

> The thorns/spiny surface resemble the thorns/spiny surface of the *sahlû*-plant. Its leaves are as big as the leaves of the *sahlû*-plant. This plant is called *namharu*. The one who drinks (from the sap of the plant) will die. (Köcher 1955: no. 33, obv. 12–13)

The value of these texts depended primarily on the precision of the description and secondarily on the name of the plant and its medical employment. The compilation of lexica and plant description texts thus served a twofold purpose—medical pragmatism and antiquarian scholarship.

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Medicinal substances

Medical ingredients are of plant, animal, and mineral origin. However, plants and plant products dominated the practitioner's repertoire, including herbs, trees and bushes, spices, grasses, algae, aromatic plants, and even funghi. Many medicinal plants, such as onion, garlic, pomegranate, fig, and date also served as foodstuffs in the normal diet. Because of the patterns of drug nomenclature discussed above, it is difficult to assess how many substances of animal origin were used. Alongside body parts of domesticated animals such as sheep, goat, pig, cow, and donkey, parts of birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibia were used for medicinal purposes, as well as insects, arachnids, crustacea, and molluscs. However, it should be emphasized that the true nature of all these ingredients remains uncertain. It is even more difficult to determine the therapeutic uses of mineral substances: depending upon impurities or physical alterations such as weathering, what counted as 'river mud' in one region may have been quite different with respect to texture, colour, and odour in another. Rather frequently, we find mention of sulphur, arsenic compounds, and other clay-like substances, as well as a number of precious and semi-precious stones whose qualities are enumerated in lapidaries. One of the most prominent examples of a lapidary is the descriptive text usually referred to as *Abnu Šikinšu*, literally 'the appearance of the stone/mineral'. The *ašgikû*-stone, for example, whose powder is used in a medical prescription to treat pulsating veins of the temples (Attia and Buisson 2003: 10, 15 l. 219′), is described as follows: 'The appearance of the stone resembles green obsidian but [with/without] striations. As for this stone, *ašgikû* is its name' (Horowitz 1992: 116).

An overview of medical ingredients would not be complete without mention of the inactive substances that serve as carriers for the active ingredients, and which were usually household items. Lastly, there are a substantial number of composites—some medicaments count up to 100 compound drugs—whose preparation and administration are described in medical recipes.

Substances of plant origin

Medical recipes and herbals refer more often than not to entire plants rather than to plant parts. However, in comparing parallel recipes it can be observed that some manuscripts refer to the part of the plant to be used, whereas others omit such details. It seems that ancient Mesopotamian practitioners did not consider this kind of information to be relevant enough to be recorded, or possibly took it for granted when compiling prescriptions and herbals. Only the plant description texts are somewhat more consistent as regards the parts of the plant and their efficacy, listing a wide variety of parts including roots, stems, leaves, flowers, fruits, seed, and many more (Herrero 1984: 53–54). References to plant products such as flour, powder, chips, and ashes can also be found.

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As mentioned above, around 340 drugs of plant origin were circulating in Assyria and Babylonia. This number refers only to single ingredients and does not include drugs which are part of compounds. In spite of Reginald Campbell Thompson's strenuous efforts to identify ancient Mesopotamian medical ingredients (Thompson 1936; 1949), only a small fraction of medicinal substances can presently be identified with certainty. These include several trees including fruit trees, oil plants, cereals, a few culinary herbs, and plants of the *Allium* genus. One of the main problems with plant identification is, of course, the complete lack of correlation between plant names and plant samples or plant illustrations; another is the nature of the information in the cuneiform sources. It is not only the use of the same term for different plants that poses problems for identification but also the ancient cognitive approach towards plant classification. A description such as, 'a plant has reddish brown flowers or buds and small leaves' might have been sufficient for ancient Mesopotamian practitioners but is not adequate for modern historians.

Matters are further complicated if we take as a starting point those plants which grew in Iraq around the time that the medical and pharmacological literature was compiled. Though ample archaeobotanical data exists for a large number of ancient Near Eastern sites, not every region and period is equally well covered. For the early second millennium the only evidence available is from Sippar, some 70 km north of Babylon, where twenty-eight different plants are attested (Zeist 1984). But not all of them may also have grown in the ancient city of Assur, for instance which is situated on the Tigris river some 320 km north of Babylon and around 100 km south of Mosul, and where the oldest pharmacological texts come from. Assur belongs to the vegetational region of moist steppe, while Sippar is in a sub-desert zone.

Substances of animal origin

Drug names refer to substances such as the blood of animals (mammals, reptiles), flesh (cow, pig, dove, and gazelle), eggs, bile (especially fish bile), urine, milk, and faeces (see Herrero 1984: 58). Just as for other animal parts (see above), some two-word terms for faeces in all likelihood designate plants rather than genuine animal waste products. An exception is guano which in ancient Mesopotamia meant bat excrement, and for which no 'technical' plant name is known. Another group of two-name terms follows the scheme 'reptile/insect from the field'. Characteristic for this group is that the plain terms designating the animal occur in lexical texts and are clearly identified as animals. But when mentioned with the expression 'of the field', as attested several times in medical recipes, the terms are classified with the determinative Ú for plants. In other words, these names should be accordingly understood as plant names, reflecting perhaps the symbiosis of some insects and small reptiles with their host or food plant (Böck 2008: 321). A problem arises when the expression 'of the field' is missing: occasionally we find the plain animal term with the determinative Ú which leaves no doubt as to the nature of the

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ingredient; see, for example, the so-called *halulaya* insect which appears in a prescription for incontinence, written *ú halulaya* (for the text see Geller 2005: 60, ii 32′). But there are also attestations of insect and reptile names without any determinative; such is the case for one of the recipes to treat calculus (a stone in the urinary track):

> Prescription no. 7: Dry *halulaya*, crush it, [keep it overnight under a starry sky], it should not be exposed to contamination, (the patient) should drink it, [then he will recover]. (Geller 2005: 38, iii 12–13)

Another animal product is cheese or 'old cheese'; as for the latter, old cheese is even attested as a simple drug. The prescription is only partly preserved: 'you squeeze old cheese of the GA.BA kind which does not contain water, knead it together with water…' (Köcher 1964: no. 264, ii 11).

Animal products can be employed as medicinal substances and are listed as such together with drugs of plant origin or are used in the preparation of medicines. As far as milk is concerned, it served as the liquid carrier substance for taking medicaments, though it is less often attested than beer. The sinews or tendons of the gazelle, probably from the animal's legs, were used as threads to fix phylacteries or to bead and knot ingredients for the fabrication of amulets. The blood of reptiles could be used to cure scorpion stings or the bite of serpents, though it cannot be excluded that terms such as 'blood of the *pizallurtu*-gecko' refer to coded plant names. However, prescriptions such as 'if a scorpion has stung a man, cut the head of a *pizallurtu*-gecko and smear the blood on the wound, (the patient) should drink instant beer' (Scheil 1918: 76, obv. 18′) seem to point to an animal.

Fish bile, as irritating as it is, is one of the ingredients to treat afflictions of the eye, such as blindness (Soden 1966). Another animal product is honey. Known for its antibacterial and antiseptic properties, it was used in wound care in antiquity (Majno 1975: 116–120). However, evidence for apiculture is scarce in ancient Mesopotamia; the native terms, Akkadian *dišpu* and Sumerian **làl**, can refer to both honey and date syrup (Volk 1999). The first document which records beekeeping dates to the 8th century BC and comes from the Middle Euphrates area (Cavigneaux and Ismail 1990).

Carrier substances and dosage forms of medicaments

From a technological point of view it is convenient to distinguish between the different procedures for preparing medicaments, which range from the taking of single drugs to complex manufacturing processes. Substances with medicinal properties could be ingested directly without previous treatment of the ingredient(s), by eating the fresh herb, fruit, or other plant parts. Another relatively simple method is the mixture of one or more drugs, which had been crushed, chopped, minced, or pulverized, in a watery or oily liquid in order to administer the medicament (Goltz 1974: 25–56; Herrero 1984: 61–86). Once the ingredients were ready for further processing the carrier substance

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was selected. The choice of carriers was dependent on the method of dosage: solid, liquid, or semi-liquid.

Preparation was rather laborious if the active ingredients had to be extracted first. Several extraction methods can be identified, including maceration, decoction, and digestion (Böck 2009: 110–116). For maceration, drugs are left in contact with the liquid for a long period of time, usually at room temperature (15°–20°C)—the term 'room temperature' is, of course, not attested in cuneiform texts. The procedure is referred to when drugs have to be kept in a liquid solvent and exposed overnight to the starry sky. For example, 'You shall keep (the macerate) overnight under the stars', or 'You shall keep it overnight, place it on the roof' (for examples see Böck 2009: 113). Digestion requires that drugs and liquid are kept in a closed container at a higher temperature (40°–50°C). A recommendation for preparing a digestion is: 'Pound together these 18 drugs in equal parts, soak them in beer and vinegar, enclose it in a kiln (and) remove it the next morning' (for examples see Böck 2009: 114–115). For a decoction, ingredients are added to a liquid carrier and then brought to the boil, as in the prescription 'You shall bring it to the boil in a bronze kettle (and) filter it' (for examples see Böck 2009: 115).

Solid dosage methods

Solid dosage methods included pills, suppositories, and a variety of powders (Goltz 1974: 64–65, 75–76, 82–83; Herrero 1984: 105–107, 111–112, 113). Pills and suppositories were usually made with suet (mutton or beef), but beeswax, ghee, date pith, pulp of bitter cucumber, and several tree resins are also attested, sometimes as mixtures (Böck 2009: 124). The commonest inactive carriers for powders were flours of roasted grains, wheat, and malt. Powders for external use were applied to the skin to treat wounds and irritations. Powders for internal use were introduced into body cavities such as ears, nostrils, eyes, vagina and penis with the help of a copper tube (for examples see Herrero 1984: 111–112). Occasionally, the medicament had to be sniffed or inhaled directly into the nostrils by the patient, as in the following prescription: 'If a woman has given birth, has intestinal problems caused by bile and is inflated with wind, let her sniff copper dust from a drum, then she will recover' (Köcher 1964: no. 240, obv. 26).

Liquid dosage forms

As for liquid dosage methods, ancient Mesopotamian practitioners used a variety of diluents including water and water extractions, oil and herbal oil extractions, syrups, beer of different qualities, wine, vinegar, milk, and animal urine (Herrero 1984: 57–59). For extractions, substances were dissolved in water or oil. The resulting solution was probably filtered before use. Best attested is the water extracted from the *kasû*-plant, if the interpretation of the expression 'water of the *kasû*-plant' is correct. Except for urine,

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all these diluents are attested for the preparation of potions. Potions usually consisted of mixtures of one or more drugs, which were either directly dissolved in oil or water or whose active ingredients were first extracted and then suspended in a liquid. Enemas and emetics were administered in beer, syrup, oil, water, or water extractions (Herrero 1984: 92–93; Böck 2009: 117–119). To help the patient vomit a feather was often used. Enemas were introduced into the anus through a reed tube or a leather hose (Böck 2009: 118). As liquid to administer purgatives, oil, beer, water, water extractions, and occasionally mixtures including wine, vinegar, milk, and urine were used (Herrero 1984: 92–93). Water and water extractions served as the basis for the preparation of therapeutic baths; the patient was bathed either in water, cold or warm, or in water that contained medication. Bathing was part of quite an elaborate therapy for the case of a woman who could not give birth. The passage (as presented in Köcher 1964: no. 244, obv. 10–30) is badly preserved; here are lines 18–20: 'Let her enter the bath, massage her until the water is cold…, let her go out of the bath, rub her with a liniment…This woman should take baths for three days.…'

Another medication method consisted of lotions, which were meant for external application without friction. As diluent we usually find water and water extractions, oil and herbal oil extractions, but also syrup or honey and beer of different qualities, and sporadically urine. After treatment the affected area was often covered with a bandage. Still another method of administering a liquid dosage was to pour the medicament drop by drop (instillation), as was prescribed for diseases of the eye and ear (Herrero 1984: 110–111; Fincke 2000: 281–283). For this treatment it was mainly water extractions, oil and oil extractions, and plant saps that served as diluents.

Semi-liquid and semi-solid dosage methods

Semi-liquid dosage methods ranged from ointments or creams and liniments to poultices and pastes. Ointments were meant to soften or soothe the skin; a special form of ointment for eyes was based on carriers that contained ghee, oil and oil extractions, suet, wax, or animal fat (Herrero 1984: 104–105; Fincke 2000: 275–281). Liniments were for massaging the skin in order to treat muscle diseases and complaints, and were thus mostly based on oily carriers, including ghee. Creams, which are likewise meant for external use, may have an aqueous or an oily base. Pastes differ from ointments and creams in that they contain a rather higher proportion of finely powdered ingredients, which make the medicament more solid, even stiff. We should probably speak of pastes when referring to medicinal substances which, once pulverized and mixed with oil or oil extractions, resins, or plant pulps, were applied to wool or textile strips and introduced into the ears, nostrils, vagina, or anus. Another semi-solid dosage mass is the poultice, which was spread on a dressing and applied to affected areas such as eyes, head, or limbs. For poultices the medicinal substances were often added to a hot carrier: beer of different qualities, water and water extractions, oil and oil extractions, syrup, vinegar, milk, or wax (Herrero 1984: 100–103).

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Another form of applying medication is fumigation, in which the medicinal ingredients are either put into a censer or burned over a fire (a method occasionally further specified as burning wood from a thorny bush), or mixed with oily carriers or plant saps (Herrero 1984: 109–110). Fumigations are often attested as treatment for diseases caused by supernatural agents. There even existed a compendium entitled 'Fumigation' which includes magical–medical prescriptions and incantations that were to be recited during the burning of incense (for the manual see Finkel 1991). The following elaborate recipe is directed against various forms of epilepsy and illnesses caused by contact with the hands of gods:

> If 'fall from heaven' and 'lord of the roof'-epilepsy, the hand of the god, or the hand of the goddess are upon a person, to remove it: this is the ritual. Take a he-goat, recite in his right and left ear twice the incantation 'evil god', slaughter the animal. When you pull out the knife for the first time, take what covers the cavity of the head and neck as well as the water from the black of his eyes. Naphtha, fish oil, cedar balm, *maštakal*-plant, seed from *maštakal*-plant, blood of an owl, skin of the god Kušu (according to an explanatory text this is the hide of a black bull which is sacrificed to the god Kušu), grape vine of the god Kušu (according to an explanatory text, this is a cedar shoot which has been covered with the hide of a black bull)—these are pure fumigation ingredients. Let (the patient) eat and drink *tarmuš*-plant, the plants 'it-combated-1000' and 'it-combated-20', [blood of a prisoner (according to an explanatory text this is blood of an owl)], rub him, fumigate it over coal, then he will recover. This is the incense of the he-goat. (Clay 1923: no. 34, i 1–8, no. 32).

Medicinal substances: Where did they come from?

The present state of research does not allow us to give definite answers to the question of how many ingredients ancient practitioners had at their disposal. We can roughly calculate that around 340 simple drugs circulated and could be used. Since most ingredients were of plant origin we shall now focus on vegetable drugs. How did ancient practitioners get the medicinal plants they needed to prepare medicaments? Valuable direct information about the supply of medicinal plants comes from letters such as the Middle Babylonian document written by a member of the Kassite court, who keeps his lord posted about the state of health of several singers (?) and princesses he takes care of. The person in charge requests from his lord that the mayor should send for the gardeners who could provide the practitioner with a number of medicinal plants; part of the letter should be quoted:

> When I assigned a poultice for the patient, no *ašû*-plant was available. And my lord knows that if only a single herb is missing, it will not work. I asked the mayor to send word to a gardener…The daughter of Muštalu who had a dry cough, the

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> phlegm has cleared up and…after I gave her (the medication) to drink. But then she suffered from colic and I gave her a potion for colic to drink. There is no seed of *šakirû*-plant or pressed wine. My lord, send some so that I can administer a potion before she develops into the 'hand of curse'. The princess who had repeated strokes of fever has now calmed down thanks to the poultices and potions. As for the drugs of which I spoke to my lord, my lord should not forget about them. Let [my lord] set aside and send to me resin of asa foetida, resin of…and 'sword plant'—appropriate drugs for colic –, 'sword plant', *merginānu*-plant, *arariyānu*-plant, *namruqqu*-plant, *sahlānu*-plant,…plant, seed of the 'alone (growing) plant', *kurkānû*-plant,…plant,…plant, thyme, and…plant. (Parpola 1983: 495–496, ll. 12–38; text collated)

Precious information about likely places for cultivating medicinal plants can be found in the reports about the deeds and achievements of the Assyrian kings. A recurrent topic in these annals is the planting of exotic and botanical gardens (Figure 32.2), which demonstrated not only the prestige of the ruler but also his imperial dominion, since foreign species were introduced as tributes and gifts to the king or collected during military campaigns (Foster 1998).

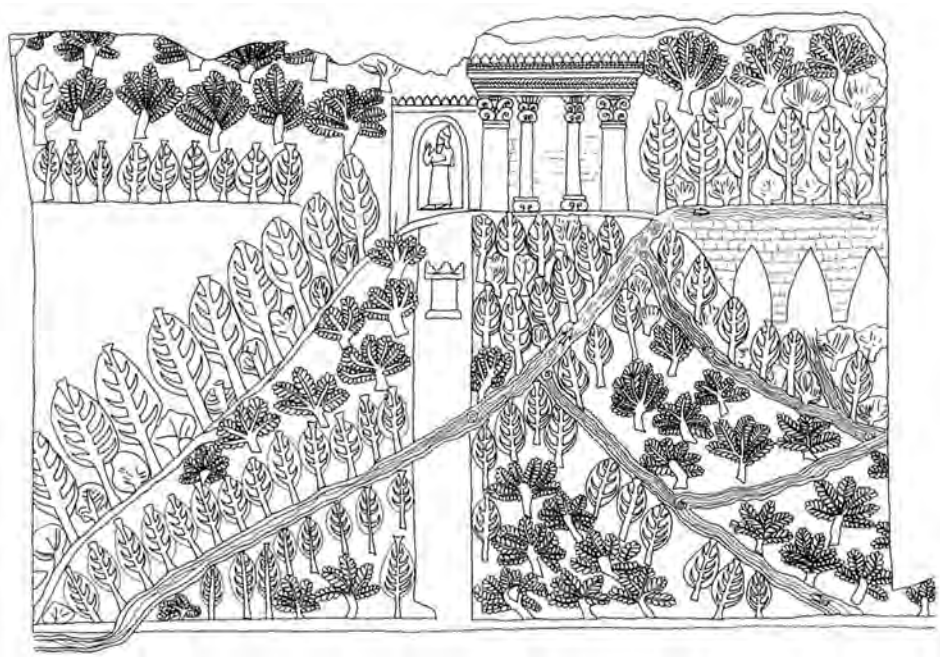

FIGURE 32.2 Assyrian parkland, planted with various tree species, probably depicting the pleasure gardens created by Sennacherib at Nineveh: detail of a stone relief from Room H of Assurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh (British Museum, ME 124939A). (Drawing by S.M. Dalley, reproduced from Dalley 1994: 51, Figure 1, with the kind permission of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, formerly the British School of Archaeology in Iraq)

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An eloquent example comes from the reign of the 9th-century king Assurnasirpal II: engraved on a large stone slab, which was found in the North West palace of Kalhu, is a detailed list of the trees that Assurnasirpal saw in the highlands and probably transplanted to his orchard (Grayson 1991: 290). The inscription then describes a copious banquet that the Assyrian king celebrated on the occasion of dedicating the palace. The text mentions forty-two trees, of which twenty-eight are attested in other sources as medicinal drugs. These are important data, especially if we take into account that the pharmacological and medical texts refer to no more than thirty-five different trees or shrubs, aromatic plants excluded, which are used as simple drugs. In other words, most of the trees used for drugs grew and could be cultivated within reach of the ancient practitioners. Mesopotamian gardens were so famous that they were one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. In spite of the various locations in Babylon that have been proposed for the Hanging Gardens, no archaeological evidence has yet been found (Finkel 1988; Dalley 1994). A small tablet ascribed to king Marduk-apla-iddina, who ruled Babylon in the early 8th century BC, refers to plants cultivated in his royal garden (Finkel 1988: 47–48; Finkel 2008: 110). The text lists sixty-seven plants, about half of which are attested as medicinal drugs.

That a considerable number of medicinal substances could be stored is evident from documents such as the drug inventory from Assur, dating from the 7th century BC (Goltz 1968; Limet 1986; Tavernier 2008). The text probably gives an account of how many drugs were kept in a house, if we assume that the tablet was of practical use. The medicinal substances were kept in wooden shelves; in addition bowls and pans as receptacle for fumigations are mentioned. One section refers to bowls in which carrier substances were kept: 'cedar balm, ghee, syrup, naphtha, fish oil, bitumen, wax, dust of…, all kinds of oil, vinegar—in total x bowls' (Köcher 1955: no. 36, v 36–vi 2). The inventory lists the names of 177 drugs, of which 159 drugs are of vegetable origin, including trees, aromatic plants, and herbs, which is about half of the number of the medicinal plants attested as simple drugs in Mesopotamian sources.

But not all plants could be ordered from gardeners or otherwise easily obtained; there are some indications that ancient practitioners themselves picked and collected plants. Parenthetical references to plant habitat in medical recipes include comments that the medicinal plant 'was not exposed to the sun when it was dug up' or 'grew on a mud wall' or 'was exposed to the north wind'. A ritual handbook against 'evil headaches' provides the following passage, which is addressed to the incantation priest:

> Look for a squash which grows alone in the plain; when the sun has set, cover your head with a cloth, cover the squash, too; then draw a magic circle with flour around the plant and the next morning, when the sun rises, pull it out from its spot and take its root! (Reiner 1995: 36)

Probably because there was danger involved or because a certain authority was required, collection had to be carried out by the practitioner.

The evidence discussed seems to indicate that a significant number of medicinal plants were rather common. They could be cultivated and grew within reach; only if plants with specific properties were required did the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian practitioners probably have to look for wild (?) plants, such as squash in the plain.

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Further reading

Informative overviews for medical literature that provide further bibliographic references are Biggs (1995), Geller (2010), Kinnier Wilson (1982), Reiner (1995: 43–60), and Robson (2008). Excellent studies of the structure of prescriptions can be found in Goltz (1974) and Herrero (1984). The contributions on the history of cuneiform medical writings in *Le Journal des Médecines Cunéiformes* (Paris 2002–) range from editions of single works to studies of diseases and discussions of medical practitioners. The complete edition of pharmacological texts is forthcoming by the present author, but see for now the descriptions of the corpora by Stol (2004–05) and Böck (in press). For identifications of medicinal plants the reader is referred to the still valuable work of Thompson (1949); further discussions on plant identification can be found in Powell (1993), and volumes 2 and 3 of the *Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture* (1985, 1987).

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CHAPTER 33

CHANGING IMAGES OF KINGSHIP IN SUMERIAN LITERATURE

NICOLE BRISCH

IMAGES of kingship abound in the hymns, myths, and narratives of the late third and early second millennia BC. But who created these images and who controlled them? In this chapter I will explore whether ancient Mesopotamian kings were able to influence and model intellectual activity, as visible in (selected) Sumerian literary texts, in order to maintain and support their political rule. However, the relationship between politics and the scholarly production of literature is too complex to be characterized as a one-to-one relationship in which all literature is directly influenced by political concerns. Clearly, writing cannot be viewed separately from power, be it religious, economic, or political, yet there is also a danger of reducing ancient writing to a mere tool of propaganda, an *ideological* narrative solely written to support the goals of political elites. Although cuneiform culture was, by and large, part of an elite sphere, it is questionable whether the sole purpose of writing was the ideological underpinning of politics. All too often other aspects of ancient literary writing, whether aesthetic, intellectual, or material, are neglected in favour of overt political and historical reconstructions that appeal to modern scholars, who are used to narratives that explain history and culture in explicit and descriptive ways.

The most overt connection between kings and literature can be found in the genre of royal hymns (also known as 'royal praise poetry' and 'invocative lyric genres'). Hymns in general are one of the oldest genres in Sumerian literature, first attested in the Early Dynastic period (*c.* 2600 BC) (Brisch 2010). However, almost all surviving manuscripts date to the late third and early second millennia BC. Modern scholars usually distinguish between divine, royal, and temple hymns. Most of these hymnal texts exhibit features such as poetic language and rhetorical figures that will allow us to assign them to the realm of the literary. Some royal hymns are in fact addressed to deities but also contain

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prayers or blessings for kings. Others were written in praise of kings exclusively, while some were even composed as self-praise: that is, as if the king were praising himself. According to an estimate by Miguel Civil (Edzard 1994: 19), royal hymns constitute about a quarter of the Sumerian literary corpus and thus represent a significant portion of the tradition. Yet Sumerian royal hymns are only attested in the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods (*c.* 21st–17th centuries BC), after which they died out as a genre. However, kings also figured prominently in other Sumerian literary works, most notably narratives about (semi-divine) heroes or historical and mythological kings. It would go far beyond the framework of this chapter to discuss all of these compositions in detail, yet some of them will be mentioned to complete the picture offered by royal hymns. They range from Sumerian tales surrounding Gilgameš, the semi-divine heroic king of Uruk (ETCSL §1.8), the Sumerian King List (ETCSL 2.1.1), the *Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (ETCSL 2.2.3), and *The Cursing of Agade* (ETCSL 2.1.5), as well as some petitionary literary letters (see Huber Vulliet in this volume). First, however, we begin with a chronological survey of the surviving evidence.

The Ur III period (*c.* 2112–2004 BC)

The Ur III period, named after the Third Dynasty of the city of Ur, has left us with an abundance of textual evidence from its hegemony over southern Mesopotamia that lasted less than a century. The overwhelming majority of this evidence, some 57,000 published tablets, comprises written records of the state administration. Almost all known Ur III administrative documents come from southern Mesopotamia but relatively few were discovered through scientific archaeological excavation. Most are presumed to belong to the state economy, a somewhat vague term as the role of the state was not always clearly defined, and there is some disagreement over whether private administrative texts (and a private economy) existed at all. Nevertheless, it is clear that the king and his estate wielded significant economic, as well as political, power.

By contrast, we have only very few written witnesses of intellectual culture from the Ur III period itself, whether mathematical (Robson 2008: 306), lexical (Sallaberger 1999: 128), or literary (Rubio 2000). As we shall see, at least some literary texts of the Ur III period were transmitted until the Old Babylonian period, where they served as teaching materials in scribal schools. Robson (2008: 54–85) has argued convincingly that the absence of mathematics from the Ur III textual corpus as we have it does not indicate a stagnation in mathematical thinking. Equally, one cannot conclude from the dearth of literary and lexical texts that these areas of intellectual activity were not important in the Ur III period. Yet for literary texts the situation is complex. It has been assumed that a large proportion of Sumerian literature was actually composed during the Ur III period and only copied during the Old Babylonian period (Wilcke 1993). Owing to the lack of evidence this assumption is impossible to prove until more evidence has emerged (see already Sallaberger 1999: 128).

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Only a very few royal hymns are known from manuscripts that can be dated to the Ur III period with any degree of certainty (Rubio 2000). They are two compositions of king Ur-Namma, the first king of the Third Dynasty of Ur, and one composition of Šulgi, the second ruler, who reigned for almost half a century. Although many more hymns are preserved in copies from the Old Babylonian period, there is little evidence as yet that they were actually composed during the Ur III period. Conversely, it is well known that an Ur III period literary catalogue, which was published by Hallo (1963), cites many works of literature and royal hymns that are unknown to us (Michalowski 2003; Brisch 2007: 16–17). For example, the catalogue mentions thirty-two royal hymns (*endu lugal*), only one, possibly two, of which have been identified by modern scholars. We cannot exclude the possibility that all royal hymns of Ur III kings that are currently known only as Old Babylonian manuscripts actually date back to the Ur III period, in spite of the lack of any evidence. Yet the Ur III literary catalogue indicates that many more compositions must have existed that were not transmitted and are thus lost to us, at least until textual witnesses are found. The same probably holds true for other literary compositions of the late third millennium.

It is clear that a large part of Ur III literature as known from the Ur III period itself was about kings and can therefore be considered an expression of royal ideology. Yet the question whether the king hired scribes to compose these royal praise songs and narratives is not easily answered. First, there is little to no reliable evidence about who authored these compositions. Authorship in the modern sense was not a feature of ancient Mesopotamian literature (see Foster and Robson in this volume). Only very few compositions mention the names of 'authors', often to lend them increased authority or tradition. The hymns that are attributed to Enheduana, daughter of Sargon, the first king of the Old Akkadian dynasty (r. *c.* 2334–2279 BC), and high priestess of the god Nanna at the city of Ur, may be one such instance. Several scholars have raised doubts about Enheduana's authorship of the hymns attributed to her in antiquity (Civil 1980; Black 2002; Rubio 2009: 27–28; see also Lion in this volume).

Internal evidence from the hymns themselves is contradictory. Some state that kings composed them (for example, Šulgi B, ETCSL 2.4.2.20), while others are attributed to 'experts', Sumerian *ummia* (for example, Šulgi E, ETCSL 2.4.2.05). Whether these claims can be substantiated through independent evidence is unclear. It is unlikely that many kings of the third or early second millennium BC were able to read and write, and only a few kings in Mesopotamian history ever claimed that they could (Charpin 2008: 32–38; Frahm in this volume). Even if they were literate, it was most likely on a rather basic level. There is a clear difference between composing a Sumerian royal hymn and writing administrative texts and letters (Charpin 2008: 87–88). The production of Sumerian literary works at a time when Sumerian had died out as a spoken language (so Michalowski 2000; 2006; Rubio 2006; Sallaberger 2004; but cf. Edzard 2000; Woods 2006), using complex poetic structures and vocabulary, was presumably a skill that only very few specialists were able to acquire. Writing Sumerian literature was not a very common skill anywhere in Mesopotamia. A well-known letter from Mari on the middle Euphrates, to the northwest of Babylonia, bemoans the difficulty of finding a scribe who knows

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Sumerian (Charpin 1992: 24–25; 2008: 86). During the Old Babylonian period if not earlier, Sumerian was a 'language of prestige', to borrow Dominique Charpin's phrase.

Although the term *ummia*, which can be translated 'scholar,' is attested in Ur III administrative documents, in that context it did not refer exclusively to an expert in writing. An *ummia* could also be a master craftsman or an expert in music (Michalowski 2010). Moreover, among the many Ur III administrative documents there is as yet no evidence that would offer proof for the existence of an institution called a 'school'. If the presumed 'imperial schools' of the Ur III period, which are thus far known only from literary texts of the Old Babylonian period, were indeed as important as recently presumed by some scholars (George 2005; Charpin 2008: 77), one would expect at least some evidence in the administrative record of the state. Yet the Sumerian words for 'school' (*edubba'a*), 'place of learning' (*ki-umun*), and '(the goddess Nisaba's) House of Wisdom' (*e-geštug (Nisaba)*) are not attested at all outside the literary corpus. The suggestion that *dubsar tur*, a term that does occur in administrative records, should be understood as 'scribal student' or 'scribal apprentice' (Waetzoldt 1986: 39 and n. 15) is unlikely, since it just means 'junior scribe' (as opposed to *dubsar mah* 'senior scribe'). Therefore it cannot be counted as evidence for state-sponsored schooling in the Ur III period. The absence of scribal exercise tablets from the Ur III period has been explained by the lack of excavations of private houses of the Ur III period (Charpin 2008: 66 and n. 117–118). Yet, if one assumes that the teaching of scribes during the Ur III period took place in private houses as well as public buildings, the question of state sponsorship of schooling and literature becomes more complex. Robson (2008: 84) has recently suggested that during the Ur III period scribal learning took place through apprenticeship and 'situated learning', to familiarize scribal students with their future work environment and introduce them to their future tasks. Perhaps a similar process may have to be assumed for the teaching of literature, but this has to remain speculative. Alternatively, it is always possible that not a single school of the Ur III period has been discovered yet and that one or more may be excavated in the future.

One of the three royal hymns that is already attested in the Ur III period is Šulgi A, also called *Šulgi, the Runner* (Klein 1981b: 167–217, ETCSL 2.4.2.01). Not only are we in the happy position of having a fragmentary Ur III manuscript of this text (Rubio 2000: 216; 2006: 172), but also its main theme is alluded to in one of king Šulgi's year names. In early Mesopotamia each year of a king's reign was named after an event that was considered particularly significant. Šulgi's 7th regnal year (2088–2087 BC) was named 'The year in which the king [Šulgi] travelled from the city of Ur to the city of Nippur (and back).' Šulgi A describes in great detail how the king, who was not only intelligent but also physically fit, ran from the capital city Ur to the religious centre Nippur and back in a single day so that he could celebrate important festivals in both cities. The distance between these two cities is roughly 200 km as the crow flies, so it is impossible for the real king Šulgi to have accomplished this feat. This composition not only glorifies the physical image of the king's superhuman strength and speed; it also is a poetic testimony to the king's efforts to perform the rituals and mark the festivals that ensured the benevolence of the gods. Although our knowledge of these festivals and rituals is very incomplete, we

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know that the king was required to attend so that the cosmic order could be maintained and the land could continue to prosper. The dissemination of this ideology, which saw the king as chosen and appointed by the gods to bring order and justice to the land of Sumer, also served to legitimize the king's rule.

Amongst the other literary manuscripts of the Ur III period is a fragment of a tale of Gilgameš, the legendary king of the city of Uruk. Gilgameš, part human, part divine, played an important rôle in the inscriptions of the Ur III kings. In particular, Šulgi, who declared himself divine some time early in the third decade of his reign, achieved this by claiming that he was Gilgameš's brother and therefore also the son of Lugalbanda—another legendary king of Uruk—and the goddess Ninsumun. The Sumerian Gilgameš tales as well as the narratives about other heroic kings of the past, such as Enmerkar and Lugalbanda, offered an ideological buttress for Ur III kingship, in particular for the kings' claims to divine status (Michalowski 2008).

Yet we should not assume that such benign images of kingship were universally accepted. Ur III rosters recording the presence of labourers at a work project sometimes show the remark 'absent' or 'escaped' (**zah**) after some of the workers' names. It is likely that this remark should be interpreted as 'escaped' rather than 'absent', because we know that in some cases royal messengers were charged with retrieving escapees. Sources from later periods also indicate that flight was a serious social problem (Snell 2001: 58–60). In ancient societies flight can be considered a very basic form of resistance (Grotanelli 1985: 19), so it is possible that these workers were refusing to fulfil their obligations to the state. This in turn could suggest that royal ideology had failed at convincing portions of the labouring classes of society, in the face of perhaps harsh working conditions and impoverishment. However, given that labourers were almost certainly illiterate, and unlikely to have mixed in scholarly and courtly circles, they were presumably not the intended addressees of royal hymns or other literary works. We simply do not know how widely such compositions circulated, but it is likely that cruder forms of royal ideology and propaganda were deployed on the kingdom's workforce.

It is more probable that the audiences for such literature can be found among the ancient elites. Thus far, our evidence points to threats to royal power as coming from the royal family itself or from families or individual members of the elite (Michalowski 2004). A recent study shows that the crown levied taxes in the form of livestock and redistributed them among key members of the state as gifts to ensure their continued loyalty (Sallaberger 2003–04). Topmost among the recipients of these gifts were members of the royal family, senior officials, and musicians, most notably Dada, one of the foremost musicians of the Ur III period. Surprisingly, scribes and priests are absent from the lists of gift recipients. Whether this is because it was not necessary to reward scribes through additional gifts because they were already loyal servants of the king, or whether it indicates that scribes were simply not important enough to receive loyalty gifts has to remain open.

Some scholars have argued that most if not all literary texts are closely connected with music and performance (e.g. Alster 1992; Cooper 1992), while others have seen little

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overlap between oral and written traditions (e.g. Michalowski 1992) or suggested a complex vision of the relationship between oral and written literature (Vanstiphout 1992). However, whether musicians or singers also composed hymns or other literary works is unclear. Evidence from the hymns themselves shows that musicians were performers but not scribes or composers, and as yet there is no evidence for musicians having influenced the scribal or literary culture of Mesopotamia. I have argued recently that the literary history and intertextual aspects of Sumerian hymns make it unlikely that the hymns as preserved in the written cuneiform tradition were composed to be sung (Brisch 2010). Their value should be viewed first and foremost as works of literature, not as music, or as sources for the reconstruction of history. Therefore the inclusion of musicians in royal gift-giving practices should not be seen as implicit evidence for the courtly patronage of literary composition.

Overall, it has been noted that the majority of the Ur III royal hymns (as evidenced in manuscripts from the Old Babylonian period) were written in praise of kings rather than as divine hymns with prayers for kings (Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 14). Most of the extant Ur III hymns, over twenty of them, were written in praise of Šulgi, the second and longest-reigning king of the dynasty. As we have seen in the case of Šulgi A, many of these poems depict him as a physically and mentally powerful individual, and in modern scholarship have become paradigmatic of the (ideal) image of the king. Šulgi claimed that he could read and write, and that he was a skilful mathematician and an accomplished musician, amongst other talents. Yet royal hymns for other Ur III kings could be very different from these compositions that extolled the king as a superhuman hero. A group of three love-songs that mention king Šu-Suen, the fourth king of the Ur III dynasty, praise him together with his mother and his wife, presenting a feminized context for kingship (Šu-Suen A–C, ETCSL 2.4.4.1–3). It is probably because of this that these hymns are not written in the main dialect of Sumerian but in Emesal, a literary (and sacred) dialect that was only employed in lamentation literature and in the direct speech of goddesses (see Löhnert in this volume). Although such hymns have sometimes been connected with the so-called 'Sacred Marriage Rite' between king and goddess (Sefati 1998; Rubio 2009: 61–62), it would probably fall short to reduce them to just a single function. Rather they should be viewed within the larger context of varying nuances and changes in royal ideology.

The Old Babylonian period (c. 2000–1600 BC)

The Old Babylonian period offers much more evidence, albeit intermittent, than the Ur III period for Sumerian literature in general and royal hymns in particular. Studies of the past ten or fifteen years have given us much of the social and functional context of Old Babylonian Sumerian literature (see Tinney in this volume). In particular the city

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of Nippur has yielded an unprecedented number of tablets that record literary works and other genres connected to the education of scribes during that time. In addition there is a substantial body of administrative and legal texts that is probably smaller in number than its Ur III counterpart (no definite numbers have been published for the Old Babylonian period yet).

The Old Babylonian period is often characterized as a time of political fragmentation. Whereas the kings of Ur III had achieved at least temporary hegemony over Mesopotamia, Old Babylonian kings sought but rarely achieved it. After the collapse of the Ur III state some structures seem to have continued as before, although textual evidence is so scant that nothing definitive can be said. Yet the kings of the city of Isin appear to have seen themselves as heirs to the 'empire' of Ur and attempted to continue their legacy. During the 19th century BC another power player emerged, based in the city of Larsa. The Isin and Larsa dynasties competed against each other and frequently met on the battlefield, if ancient sources are to be believed. When the last ruler of Larsa, Rim-Sin, finally defeated Isin during his 29th regnal year, it was so significant an event that the following thirty years continued to be named after this victory. In the meantime another important power had emerged in southern Mesopotamia: the first dynasty of Babylon, to the north of Isin and Larsa. Its most famous king, Hammurabi (r. 1792–1750 BC), succeeded in conquering large parts of Mesopotamia but his conquests were short-lived. Already under his son and successor Samsu-iluna (r. 1749–1712 BC) the Babylonian state began to break apart as several southern cities rebelled against northern domination.

The literary evidence for intellectual culture in the Old Babylonian period consists of texts that we assign mainly to the education of scribes. In contrast to the Ur III period, we now have a historical, social, and functional context—at least for tablets that were discovered during archaeological excavations—for one possible arena of intellectual culture: the scribal school. Chronologically, the majority of Old Babylonian school tablets come from a relatively short period, about 1790–1720 BC. By far the largest proportion of school tablets are from Nippur, *c.* 1740–1720, while the second largest group is from Ur, a little earlier than the Nippur tablets, *c.* 1790–1740. Geographically, the tablets come from all over southern Mesopotamia, although many are of unknown provenance and were acquired through the antiquities market. Those that were uncovered during scientific excavations were almost entirely discovered in private houses (for example, at Nippur, Ur, Sippar, Babylon, and Me-Turan, and in Ešnunna). Many modern scholars have assumed that the school curriculum was relatively uniform all over Mesopotamia since the major literary works, such as the Gilgameš tales, for example, have been found in almost every assemblage of scribal training tablets. There are some indications, though, that scribal education may not have been as uniform as previously thought. Nonetheless, more research is required to offer a more refined picture of Old Babylonian scribal schooling.

As I have already mentioned, most of the extant literature surrounding kings, whether hymnal, mythological, or narrative, is attested on manuscripts dating to the Old Babylonian period, although a large part of this literature is assumed to have been composed earlier. The advanced phase of scribal training at Nippur, which we presume

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consisted almost entirely of Sumerian literary texts of varying degrees of difficulty, has been very intensively studied (see, e.g., Vanstiphout 1978; 1979; 1999; Charpin 1989–90; Tinney 1999; Robson 2001; 2007; Michalowski 2003; Veldhuis 2004). Although it is clear that curricular choices varied from teacher to teacher (Robson 2001), there was a degree of consistency between schools that justifies our use of the shorthand, 'the Nippur curriculum'.

This curriculum heavily favoured literature concerning Ur III kings. In the Old Babylonian period, the Ur III hymn *Šulgi, the Runner* (Šulgi A), which we have already discussed, counted amongst the most frequently copied texts in the Nippur schools. However, many more compositions for Šulgi also existed, and for most of these there is no firm and unequivocal evidence that could substantiate their date of composition in the Ur III period. The possibility that they were composed then cannot be excluded but it is also possible to imagine that at least some of these literary texts may have been productions of the Old Babylonian period in veneration of the kings of old (see also Huber Vulliet in this volume). But regardless of when and by whom they were composed it is significant that they figured prominently in scribal education some 250 years after the kings they praise had died. The reasons for their continued transmission were doubtless complex and manifold. To interpret this tradition as having exclusively propagandistic or political value risks underestimating the sophisticated interplay between tradition, culture, religion, and politics in Old Babylonian cuneiform culture.

The dynasty of Isin (*c.* 2017–1794 BC)

It is often stated that the kings of Isin copied the style of Ur III royal hymns. Yet most of the Isin hymns are actually divine hymns that include prayers for kings; relatively few can be classified as hymns to the kings themselves. Most were written for the first five rulers of the Isin dynasty (2017–1924 BC): its founder Išbi-Erra, Šu-ilišu, Iddin-Dagan, Išme-Dagan, and Lipit-Eštar.

Of these five, many more compositions are preserved for Išme-Dagan (r. 1953–1935 BC) than for the others: thus far we know of about twenty-six hymns for this king. Some of them parallel those of Šulgi so closely that it has been suggested that they were deliberately patterned after the hymns of Išme-Dagan's Ur III predecessor. Among them are a couple of hymns which describe the fashioning of cultic objects for certain deities—for example, a barge for the goddess Ninlil (Šulgi R, ECTSL 2.4.2.18) and a chariot for the god Enlil (Išme-Dagan I, ETCSL 2.5.4.09). Even the famous *Šulgi, the Runner* found a (highly abbreviated) copy among Išme-Dagan's hymns (Šulgi A, ETCSL 2.4.2.01; Šulgi V, ETCSL 2.4.2.22; and Išme-Dagan S, ETCSL 2.5.4.19). Yet some of these parallels are doubtful, and a closer examination shows that Išme-Dagan's hymns were not mere copies but also original compositions (Tinney 1995: 8–9). Other hymns of his reveal an important motif of Ur III and Isin royal literature: the 'Sacred Marriage Rite', in which the king is ritually united with Inana, goddess of love and war. Several of Išme-Dagan's

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and Iddin-Dagan's hymns describe such rituals in a poetic fashion, detailing the close association of king and goddess.

Two hymns of king Lipit-Eštar (r. 1934–1924 BC), Hymns A and B (ETCSL 2.5.5.1–2), were amongst the most frequently learned poems in the scribal schools of Old Babylonian Nippur. This is perhaps because they describe how royal insignia, along with literacy and numeracy, were bestowed upon him by the goddess Nisaba, patron deity of scribes, and emphasize his consequent ability to make just decisions for the land.

The so-called 'city laments' are also thought to have originated during the Isin period (see Tinney 1996, with older literature). This group of half a dozen compositions describes the destruction of traditional cities such as Nippur, Ur, Eridu, and Uruk, poetically mourning that the ancient gods of Sumer have deserted their homes and left them to be destroyed (ETCSL 2.2.2–6). Rather than recalling historical events that may or may not have seen the actual destruction of these cities, they probably bemoan the end of an era—whether the collapse of the Third Dynasty of Ur or power struggles of the Old Babylonian period—and discuss the fragility of royal power.

Last but not least, the Sumerian King List (ETCSL 2.1.1) tells how kingship originated in the heavens (see, e.g., Jacobsen 1939; Michalowski 1983). It is an enumeration of all the cities that had been the seat of kingship and the kings that belonged to these dynasties from mythological times to the Isin period, with the lengths of their reigns. Some of the dynasties listed are now known to have reigned simultaneously, yet the King List presents them in consecutive order. It has been suggested that this was a deliberate fiction designed to present a Mesopotamia that was always governed by a single dynasty. We now know that the King List existed already in the Ur III period (Steinkeller 2003) and that the kings of Isin simply extended it, most likely to substantiate their claim as the rightful heirs to the Ur III state. It played no role in the self-images of the dynasties of Larsa and Babylon, whose kings created their own traditions of legitimation.

The dynasties of Larsa (1932–1763 BC) and Babylon (1792–1684 BC)

The quantity and compositional style of royal hymns changed dramatically with the dynasty of Larsa. There are far fewer hymns for the dynasties of Larsa and Babylon than for Ur III or Isin, almost none of which are attested in the Nippur schools. How do they differ from those of their predecessor dynasties? Most are attested only in single manuscripts, suggesting that it is unlikely that they were part of a mainstream school curriculum anywhere. They are also relatively short. Whereas some Ur III royal hymns had as many as several hundred lines, almost all of those from Larsa and Babylon are fewer than a hundred lines long. The Larsa and Babylon royal hymns exhibit a completely new style of composition compared to previous royal hymns (Brisch 2007: 37–74). Although they are not divine hymns with blessings for the king in the traditional sense of Sumerian hymnography, they exhibit some similar features, such as the king's piety and fulfilment

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of his obligations towards the gods. Some other Larsa and Babylon royal compositions are now categorized as 'prayers' but it is difficult to define how these should be distinguished from 'hymns'.

For example, a cycle of hymns for king Rim-Sin of Larsa (r. 1822–1763 BC), who was the longest-reigning king in Mesopotamian history, describes his participation in rituals in the temple of the moon-god Nanna, patron deity of the city of Ur (Rim-Sin D, F, and G, ETCSL 2.6.9.4, 6, 7; see now Brisch 2007: 204–209, 228–233, 236–240). Many include a mixture of praise for the king and prayers on his behalf. They emphasize that Rim-Sin was divinely chosen, that he was predestined to rule, but they also pray to the gods for the prosperity and well-being of the land and the people.

However, some motifs of the Ur III and Isin hymnic literature were discontinued. Most notably, the theme of the 'Sacred Marriage' and the king's position as the 'husband' of the goddess Inana are completely lacking from the Larsa and Babylon material. Literary allusions and references to Gilgameš, his divine mother Ninsumun, and his father Lugalbanda are also absent, despite the fact that the tales of Gilgameš, Enmerkar, and Lugalbanda were still faithfully copied in contemporary scribals schools. Indeed they are our main sources for the reconstruction of the Sumerian Gilgameš tales. *Gilgameš and Huwawa* (ETCSL 1.8.1.5(.1)) even figured prominently in the Nippur curriculum. Perhaps the disappearance of these allusions and motifs was due to a change in the image of the king and his relationship to the gods.

Instead, we see hymns and royal inscriptions being written in Akkadian for the first time, albeit only extremely few hymns and few royal inscriptions, which were often found in Sumerian–Akkadian bilingual versions). By the mid-18th century Sumerian had already died out as a spoken language, yet in Nippur (and perhaps elsewhere) scribal education continued to rely heavily on Sumerian instruction (see above). The use of the Akkadian language for royal hymns may represent the very beginning of a move away from the traditions of old and an attempt to create a new image of kingship.

The 'successful' and the 'unsuccessful' king

Although royal hymns overall are a heterogeneous group, and although it is rare that two compositions are alike, it is safe to say that the king's relationship to the gods, and his fulfilment of obligations towards them, figure prominently in this corpus. Several hymns, for example, are concerned with the kingly duty of temple building. The hymn Ur-Namma B (ETCSL 2.2.1.2) describes how the founder of the Ur III dynasty (r. 2112–2095 BC) built and decorated temples for the god Enlil and his wife Ninlil in the city of Nippur. As a result, the gods became favourable towards the king and gave him the power to defeat his enemies. Although an act like temple building may seem trivial or routine to us today, it constituted a major part of an early Mesopotamian king's duties.

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Hymns such Ur-Namma B show the positive outcomes of temple building and thereby (re-)create the image of the pious king who is in divine favour.

Some so-called 'hymns', or rather literary compositions about Ur III kings, are not hymns strictly speaking. One such is Ur-Namma A or *The Death of Ur-Namma* (ETCSL 2.4.1.1; Flückiger-Hawker 1999: 92–182). It describes how king Ur-Namma died a violent death on the battlefield and descended to the netherworld where he became a judge next to Gilgameš. While this composition does not brand Ur-Namma as an 'unsuccessful' king strictly speaking, it is clear that the death of a king, in particular on the battlefield, must have been an extraordinary event, since it signified that the king had lost divine support at a crucial time (Michalowski 2008: 35–36; Fuchs in this volume). It seems likely that this composition, by making Ur-Namma part of the Gilgameš mythology and elevating his status in the netherworld, was designed to counterbalance this calamity.

Another non-hymnic text concerning an Ur III king is a fragmentary composition called Amar-Suen A (ETCSL 2.4.3.1), notably the only surviving composition about this third ruler of the dynasty. It describes how the king attempts but fails to build a temple for the god Enki because he is unable to obtain a favourable omen from the gods. This motif is reminiscent of another literary stigmatization of a king, in the composition known as *The Cursing of Agade* (ETCSL 2.1.5; Löhnert in this volume). There it is the famous king Naram-Sin (r. 2254–2218 BC), the first Mesopotamian ruler to declare himself divine, who acquires the reputation as an unlucky ruler whom the gods have deserted. Like Amar-Suen, Naram-Sin was unable to secure the proper omen that would allow him to build a temple. In ancient Mesopotamia, most buildings were made of baked bricks, which needed regular attention and repair. Thus the building and restoring of temples was an especially important royal obligation. A king's inability to build a home for the gods is a topos signifying that he had lost divine favour and thus his regnal legitimization. Moreover, as these literary works show, it was the gods who ultimately decided which king was successful and which was not.

Most likely, Amar-Suen A does not reflect any actual neglect of temple-building duties by that king. In fact, numerous royal inscriptions testify to his extensive programme of construction and restoration (Sallaberger 1999: 165). This text is rather the negative mirror of compositions like Ur-Namma B, discussed at the beginning of this section. For reasons that are now lost to us, it branded Amar-Suen as an unlucky king who was unable to maintain a good relationship with the gods. Why these two kings in particular, Naram-Sin and Amar-Suen, were chosen to represent the 'unlucky' king is unclear. Perhaps these works of literature offered suitable explanations for the downfall of dynasties and empires: the gods had withdrawn their favour and their support.

Another genre in which kings are mentioned is literary royal correspondence (Huber Vulliet in this volume). For the Ur III kings, we have the Royal Correspondence of Ur, a group of literary works which purport to be political correspondence between the rulers of Ur III and some of their officials. Other literary letters concerning kings are poetic petitions that are addressed either to gods by kings or to divine kings. Two such letters were composed in the name of Sin-iddinam (r. 1849–1843 BC), the ninth king of the Larsa dynasty (Brisch 2007: 142–183). Thus far, they are the only literary letters known in which

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a king petitions a deity. Both begin by addressing the deities—the healing-goddess Ninisina and the sun-god Utu, patron deity of Larsa—and by praising them. Then the actual message begins, in which the king speaks in the first person, complaining bitterly to the god and the goddess. To Ninisina he complains of being sick and weak and asks the goddess to heal him. To Utu, he bemoans the fact that Utu has deserted Larsa and that enemies are threatening it. He appeals to the god to help him defeat them. If we are to believe these letters, Sin-iddinam was a weak ruler who had been deserted by the gods. Like Naram-Sin and Amar-Suen, Sin-iddinam had apparently failed to fulfil his obligations towards the gods and fallen out of favour.

However, Sin-iddinam's hymns and royal inscriptions paint a very different picture (Brisch 2007: 45–49, 81). Far from being weak and unlucky, the king is strong and supported by the gods. Again, in the portrayal of kings there is a discrepancy between their own inscriptions, which were written on architectural elements such as bricks and foundation cones (see Taylor in this volume), and the works of literature that appear to have been used for scribal training. Contrary to suggestions of the past, letters of petition and other literary letters were not actual prayers written by their purported authors but belonged to the same scribal traditions that created other didactic genres of literature (Civil 2000; Brisch 2007: 87–89). There is no evidence that might indicate who composed the Sin-iddinam letters, but this example clearly shows that the Sumerian literary tradition encompassed strands that offer contradictory and complex images of kings. Whereas the 'praise poetry' typically portrays rulers as strong, pious, and powerful, other literary works, such as the Sin-iddinam letters, *The Cursing of Agade*, and Amar-Suen A, project a very different royal image.

Literature, politics, and economy

During the periods addressed here, royal power was unstable and always under threat. More often than not kings reigned for relatively short periods of time. Most 'imperial' or territorial structures lasted no more than decades and were often threatened by rebellions, economic crises, or internal power struggles, which could quickly lead to political collapse (Yoffee 1988: 16). This holds true for the dynasties of Akkad, Ur III, and for the Old Babylonian dynasties of Isin, Larsa, and Babylon, all of which attempted to impose hegemony over large parts of Mesopotamia at different times. As a result, kings had to struggle to maintain their power, in particular if their goal was territorial expansion. Without doubt, ideology was an important tool in supporting their power structures. Yet, literature, at least as preserved in the written record, probably played a minor role in the ideological underpinnings of the state. Recent studies have suggested that literacy was probably much more widespread than previously thought, especially in the early second millennium (Charpin 2008; Veldhuis in this volume). However, as mentioned above, the writing and reading of Sumerian literature was more complex than literacy

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for daily business and political activities, and thus it is unlikely that a large part of the population had access to this poetic 'stream of tradition'.

The city of Nippur, in southern Iraq, was the religious centre of the Ur III and the Old Babylonian periods. The head of the pantheon, the god Enlil, resided there in the holiest of all temples, the Ekur (literally 'House Mountain'). In ancient Mesopotamia, as in premodern societies worldwide, the division between the sacred and the secular was not as it is today, and so religion was an important factor in every aspect of life, including politics and economy. Therefore, kings were required to show that the gods had appointed them to rule over the people and they could maintain a good relationship with the divine. The rulers of the Third Dynasty of Ur devoted considerable financial resources to supporting the temples at Nippur (Sallaberger 1997). Whether the Nippur priesthood, or perhaps better the scribes, reciprocated by composing hymns in praise of these kings is unclear, since, as mentioned above, our evidence is fragmentary.

Whereas administrative records of the Ur III period are thought to belong almost entirely to the state economy, it appears that the Old Babylonian period offered more possibilities for 'private' and entrepreneurial economic activity. Increasing debt and uncontrolled real estate sales appear to have been growing problems of the Old Babylonian economy, which made repeated interventions by kings necessary. Although these interventions could counteract abuse they still failed at truly reforming the economic system (Charpin 2004: 126, 308–310). A certain type of royal decree, which concerned exemption from taxes and military services, is attested only for the dynasty of Isin (Kraus 1984: 122). But very often, though not exclusively, these decrees concerned the city of Nippur (Kraus 1984: 16–30), thus according it a special status. The kings of the Larsa and Babylon dynasties discontinued issuing decrees that would grant tax exemption to Nippur or any other city. Instead their decrees were related to a general annulment of debts or real estate sales (Kraus 1984: 122). Perhaps Nippur was starting to lose its religious and cultural significance during this time and was therefore no longer granted special tax exemption. Hammurabi began to increase the importance of Babylon, the seat of his dynasty, along with its patron deity, Marduk. Such a profound cultural change cannot take place over a short period of time, so it was not until the end of the second millennium that this change was completely effective. Perhaps, as their influence and status ebbed away in the 18th century BC, the Nippur schools and clergy kept alive their fond memories of the Ur III and Isin kings, who had bestowed privileges upon the city for centuries before.

Charpin (1986: 269–302) has already discussed the question of independence of the clergy from the crown. While the priesthood was economically independent of the king, it nevertheless had to pay taxes in the form of silver (Charpin 1986: 271). With regard to a certain type of royal hymn attested for the rulers of Larsa and Babylon, Charpin (1986: 301–302) suggested that they had been written as a salutation to the king on the occasion of a royal visit. As for their authors, he argued that it was the priests who composed these poems, which betray an intimate knowledge of the temple and its rituals. However, since we have no information on these rituals, this theory is impossible to substantiate. Others have suggested that during the Ur III period hymns were performed by singers and

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musicians, and that the musicians were also the composers of these poems. However, owing to the lack of contemporary evidence, as discussed above, this suggestion cannot be substantiated either. For the Old Babylonian period there is some evidence available. In a study of elementary educational tablets excavated from a house in the city of Sippar, Tanret (2002: 155–156, and this volume) argued that they were written by the son of a *galamah*, a 'senior lamentation priest,' who later inherited his father's office. However, it was a scribe and not the lamentation priest who conducted his son's education. While this would indicate that priests were also literate or at least trained in the basics of writing, it may also suggest that the keepers of the literary tradition were not primarily priests but scribes.

The subtext of compositions such as royal hymns, whether written in praise of kings alone or in praise of gods with blessings for kings, was that no king could reign without divine blessing. This axiom is most explicitly expressed in one of the city laments (see above), the *Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (ETCSL 2.2.3):

> Ur was indeed given kingship, but it was not given an eternal reign.
> From time immemorial, since the land was founded, until the population multiplied,
> Who has ever seen a reign of kingship that would take precedence (forever)?
> The reign of kingship was long indeed but had to exhaust itself.
> (After Michalowski 1989: 59, ll. 366–369)

Like the Sumerian King List the city laments express the frailty of royal power and are conscious that the hegemony of the most powerful dynasty could end at any time. While the royal hymns and the Sumerian King List demonstrate that the Isin kings saw themselves as the heirs to the Ur III empire, the city laments point to a distancing from the (perceived) mistakes of their predecessors. The literature about 'unsuccessful' or 'unlucky' kings might be viewed in the same context, as a means of distancing the current regime from the past, as has already been suggested for *The Cursing of Agade* (Michalowski 2004: 221). It is striking that these unsuccessful kings belonged exclusively to the Old Akkadian dynasty, Ur III, and Larsa; so far we have no evidence that any of the rulers of Isin or Babylon was thus defamed, although new evidence may change this picture.

Conclusions

Royal hymns and other literary texts, such as the Sumerian Gilgameš tales and the narratives surrounding Enmerkar and Lugalbanda, the legendary kings of Uruk, disseminated an 'ideal' image of the king as a centre of social and cosmic order. A good relationship with the gods is of particular prominence in these compositions, which show the king as the chosen one, who basks in divine favour. The hymns surrounding Šulgi are emblematic of this literary representation of the strong and superhuman king, although works about other Ur III kings—such as Šu-Suen—can be decidedly different, without being negative. It has been suggested that the narrative literature about heroic kings acted as an

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ideological underpinning of royal power during the Ur III period. However, there is little evidence to show whether this literature was indeed promulgated by an 'ideological state apparatus', such as an institutional scribal school, for which we have no contemporary evidence thus far. It is well known that most of the Ur III literary texts are attested only in copies of the Old Babylonian period, so that the question of their origins has to remain open in most cases.

The Old Babylonian period offers a much larger sample of Sumerian literature. Many of the literary works relating to the Ur III kings were transmitted into the Old Babylonian period. Indeed the abundance of royal hymns, in particular, for the kings of Ur III and Isin can be contrasted with their scarcity for the kings of Larsa and Babylon.

It has been suggested that works of literature also offered an opportunity to criticize royal power (Michalowski 2004). Such a critique was expressed obliquely by offering negative images of past kings, such as Naram-Sin in *The Cursing of Agade*, a composition that is known from manuscripts of both the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods. The composition Amar-Suen A and Sin-iddinam's petitionary letters could be viewed in essentially the same light. Similarly, although the royal hymns about the Isin kings portray them as the rightful heirs to the Ur III empire, other works hint at a more critical view of the dynasty of Ur, and in a way of kingship itself. One could interpret the Sumerian King List, also first attested in the Ur III period and then augmented by the kings of Isin, as an expression of the fragility of royal power: kings and dynasties come and go; only the divine institution of kingship endures. The *Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* carries much the same message. Overall, in spite of the critical views that some of this literature espouses, the institution of kingship as a form of government remained remarkably stable throughout Mesopotamian history.

The question of whether kings may have been patrons of literature during the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods cannot be answered easily. Evidence from the Ur III period is scarce, and from the Old Babylonian period ambiguous. Even if schooling took place in private houses, the scribes were probably not completely independent of the crown. Yet we have no evidence that kings could dictate the contents of literary works. Scholarly culture belonged to the realm of the elites, which most likely expected regular royal attention in return for their continued support of the king. Yet it is unlikely that this happened through the circulation of literature but rather through other methods, such as the lavishing of gifts upon important personages, as attested during the Ur III period. The literature that was copied particularly in the schools of Old Babylonian Nippur not only glorified the king but also glorified the schools and the importance of scribes in disseminating a king's fame. And it is noteworthy that this focus was almost exclusively on kings of the historical and mythical past, not on the rulers of the present.

The more critical literature, especially compositions about 'unsuccessful' kings, shows that the Sumerian literary image of kingship is not as uniform as we often assume. It cannot be excluded that some of these critical works may have been used by ruling kings to show themselves in a better light in contrast to their predecessors. But neither can it be ruled out that such literary works reflect power struggles within the elite. Perhaps

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royal patronage was more indirect than hitherto imagined, and it was the glorification of kings and kingship of the past that made kingship—as the only form of government—more acceptable. In this view, literature then becomes an arena for elite reflection on kingship, government, and religion.

Further reading

Overviews of Mesopotamian history can be found in Sallaberger and Westenholz (1999), Charpin, Edzard, and Stol (2004), van de Mieroop (2007), and various contributions in Chavalas (2007). Overviews of Sumerian literature can be found in Michalowski (1995), Black et al. (2004), Veldhuis (2004), and Rubio (2009). Studies of Sumerian royal hymns can be found in Flückiger-Hawker (1999), Klein (1981a; 1981b), and Brisch (2007), with additional publications in German (Römer 1965; Ludwig 1990).

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CHAPTER 34

THE PIOUS KING: ROYAL PATRONAGE OF TEMPLES

CAROLINE WAERZEGGERS

Few periods of Mesopotamian history have yielded such a rich textual record as the Neo-Babylonian period (late 7th century to 539 BC) when Babylonia experienced an upsurge in prosperity. Tens of thousands of cuneiform texts bear witness to its vibrant economy, dynamic society, and creativity in art, literature, and science. In this world, the temples were bulwarks of traditional Babylonian beliefs and values, where every day priests performed the age-old worship of the gods. Many of these priests and their families have left archives that inform us about their cultic tasks, social lives, and economic interests in different Babylonian towns. In fact, together with the huge bureaucratic archives of the Ebabbar and Eanna temples in the cities of Sippar and Uruk, the texts of these priestly families make up the bulk of the rich Neo-Babylonian text corpus, and our view of the period's history, society, and economy is, as a consequence, dominated by the world of the temples and their personnel.

The kings and palaces, on the other hand, have left only a limited corpus of highly ideological writings and a few scraps of what once must have been massive state archives. The lack of any substantial text group that can be linked to the palace is the most lamented downside of the otherwise generous Neo-Babylonian cuneiform corpus. On the upside, however, is the fact that even in temple-based corpora the figure of the king is never far away. The main sanctuaries of the land have been typified as 'royal chapels' (Driel 2002: 55) and the central authorities extended a firm hand into every sector of the temple economy. Whereas older research tended to stress the dichotomy between temple and palace as two separate institutional households, more recent studies have tempered this discourse and drawn attention to their mutual dependency (see Jursa in this volume).

In this chapter we will study a different aspect of the temple–palace relationship in the Neo-Babylonian period. We will focus on the temples not as centres of production, but as centres of worship. Our aim is to investigate the ideological basis underlying the interactions between temple and palace, leaving aside the economic patterns that defined their interdependency as institutional households. The central figures of this chapter

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will be the king and the priest, tied together in a triangular relationship through their joint worship of the gods. For practical reasons, we will limit our investigation to the last period of independent rule in Babylonia, when the throne was occupied by the so-called Neo-Babylonian kings (626–539 BC), starting with Nabopolassar (r. 625–605 BC) who gained independence from the Assyrians, and ending with Nabonidus (r. 555–539 BC) who lost it to the Persians.

The beneficence of the king

The generosity of the king towards the gods and their temples is the most persistent theme of kingship articulated in the inscriptional works of these rulers. Long narratives, composed in the first person singular, report their lavish provisions of sacrifices and their splendid repairs of temples and ziggurats. These reports can be verified to a certain degree by the material and architectural remains from this period (Finkel and Seymour 2008), and by the independent evidence from administrative texts written in the course of the kings' pious projects (Beaulieu 2005; Kleber 2008). The theme of gifting was part of an ancient southern Mesopotamian tradition of kingship that is in evidence from the third millennium BC (Renger 1976–80; 1980–83), but by neglecting other received ideas of kingship (i.e. the king as ruler of the universe, the king as righteous shepherd, the king as conqueror), the Babylonian rulers of the mid-first millennium BC turned it into the main characteristic of their self-representation (Vanderhooft 1999: 41).

The narratives of the kings are known from inscriptional works that were left in the temple precincts and along the roads, gates, and city walls that benefited from their largesse. The texts were written in cuneiform, often in a deliberately archaizing style, on the building material itself (e.g. bricks, door sockets, pavements; see Figure 34.1), on purposefully crafted objects interred in foundations and walls (e.g. cylinders, prisms, cones; see Figure 34.2), or on stelae erected for public display. Votive gifts like vases, thrones, belts, and other items for the adornment of the gods could also be provided with dedicatory inscriptions. Some of these were later copied from the original items onto clay tablets and stored away in the archives of temples and priests who took an interest in the history of royal piety. Outside the Babylonian urban context only a limited number of inscriptions from this era have been discovered (see Da Riva 2008)—for instance, the stelae erected by Nabonidus in the Arabian desert town of Tayma and in the temple of Harran in Syria, or the rock inscriptions by Nebuchadnezzar II in present-day Lebanon.

It is a common trait of all these inscriptions to focus heavily on the king as principal donor in three areas of religious patronage: the erection and renovation of temple buildings, the provision of regular sacrifices, and the supply of objects for use in the daily worship and at festivals. Within this last category falls a wide array of votive gifts: cultic vessels, thrones, chariots, boats, garments, and jewels, and in a sense even the city's streets, gates, canals, bridges, and out-of-town shrines, which were used during the dramatic

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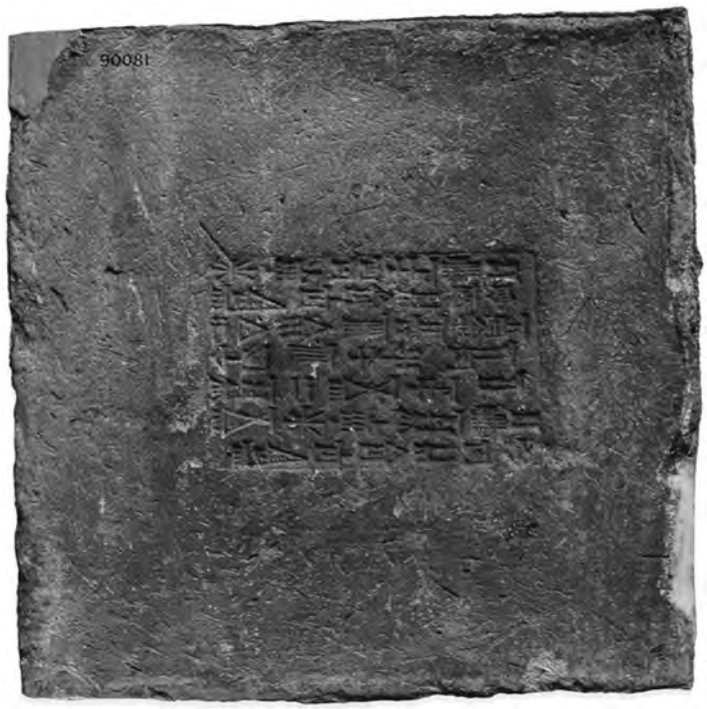

FIGURE 34.1 Brick of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 604–562 BC) (British Museum, ME 90081). This is one of several million baked bricks used to rebuild his capital, Babylon, on a grander and more magnificent scale than ever before. The inscription stamped into the centre of the brick bears Nebuchadnezzar's name, his title 'king of Babylon', the favourite epithet of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty—'provider of Esangila and Ezida'—and his filiation—'first-born son of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon'. (For the inscription see Langdon 1912: 202: Nebukadnezar 41.) (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website: http://tinyurl.com/6fnux5j).

highlights of the festivals when the statues of the gods were taken out in procession. Nearly all reported building works, whether inside temples or without, are presented as products of pious sentiment in the idiom of the royal inscriptions. The fortification of Babylon's city wall, for instance, did not only keep enemies at bay but 'guaranteed the continuation of the offerings' in the Esangila temple; the great East Wall, erected at several miles from the city centre of Babylon, was meant to 'strengthen the protection of the Esangila temple', where the life-giving cult of Marduk was maintained day after day (Langdon 1912: 80–83: Nebukadnezar 4, I 6). Nabopolassar's extension of the Euphrates towards the city of Sippar was intended to provide 'pure water of abundance for Šamaš', the sun-god who resided in the Ebabbar temple in the centre of the town (Langdon 1912: 64–65: Nabopolassar 2, II 7; and see Figure 34.2). In the idiom of the inscriptions, the urban infrastructure was turned into a service for the benefit of the gods, and the king showed himself worthy of their support by sponsoring its upkeep.

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FIGURE 34.2 Clay cone of Nabopolassar (r. 625–605 BC) (British Museum, BM 91104 (AH 82-7-14, 978)). It is written in archaizing cuneiform script, and reports how the king extended the course of the Euphrates at Sippar to provide the city god Šamaš with abundant fresh water. (For the inscription see Langdon 1912: 64–65: Nabopolassar 2.) (Photo by Mikko Luukko. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

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Other traditional values of kingship, such as military virtue, wisdom, and righteousness, are significantly less prolific in the image that these kings sought to display of themselves. In contrast to the Assyrian rulers who preceded them, Neo-Babylonian kings rarely referred to the confrontation with enemies, and they put little stress on military success as proof of divine support (Renger 1980–83; Vanderhooft 1999: 10–11). A good illustration can be found in the Wadi Brissa inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II, written on a rock in a valley of present-day Lebanon. Though the text was carved at the occasion of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of the area, the military episode receives only very brief treatment after a lengthy introduction detailing the king's paradigmatic donations to the temples of Babylon and Borsippa in the traditional heartland of Babylonia.

In addition to narratives commemorating the king's pious deeds, the ideal of generosity was expressed in the form of epithets, short formulaic phrases attached to the royal name as a kind of title (Seux 1967). Among the several dozen stock phrases that were in use at the time of the Neo-Babylonian kings, many refer to religious patronage (Da Riva 2008: 98–107): for example, 'I am the one who firmly establishes the regular offerings' (*mukīn sattukkī*), 'the one with providing hands' (*idān zāninātī*), 'the giver of wonderful gifts' (*mušarrih igisê*). Though other ideals of kingship were articulated in royal epithets, those relating to beneficence in cultic matters were particularly popular. In fact, the title most often used in inscriptional works of this period, besides the most basic title 'king of Babylon', is *zānin Esagila u Ezida* 'provider of Esangila and Ezida' (Da Riva 2008: 94). The verb *zanānu* had the particular connotation of providing materials for the temple worship, especially the foodstuffs that were required to fill the tables of the gods. The overwhelming popularity of this epithet indicates that the well-being of the gods was seen as the principal task of the king, and that two temples, the Esangila and the Ezida (in Babylon and Borsippa), were located at the centre of his patronage.

This last aspect reveals an important characteristic of the system of royal gifting. Even a cursory reading of the inscriptional works shows that there were a few major temples which attracted most of the funding, while a much larger number of minor temples attracted far less. This kind of favouritism was an integral and accepted aspect of the ideal of kingly piety, and as we shall see below the priestly audience condemned gifts thought to violate the established order of priority between the temples. Besides the order of patronage, the hallowed traditions of the cult supplied a further framework that determined how the king allocated his pious gifts. The good king respected the ancient cult practices. He was the one who 'safeguarded the cultic designs' (*muṣṣir uṣurāti bītāt ilāni*) and 'renewed the temples of the great gods' (*muddiš māhāzi ilāni rabûti*). These and similar epithets put emphasis on the king's duty to transmit the practices of the past unaltered to the future and to renew what had been wronged or undone. Long after the fall of Babylon, king Nebuchadnezzar II was still remembered for having restored the cult of Ištar of Uruk to its original state (Beaulieu 2001). The antiquarian interest of the Neo-Babylonian monarchs, who excavated temple foundations and examined the hidden messages of former kings enclosed therein (Beaulieu 1994; Schaudig 2003), can also be seen in this light. By interring their own messages alongside those recovered from the

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past, they created a lasting dialogue, written in clay, brick, and stone, with their like-minded, pious predecessors (Radner 2005):

> I [Nebuchadnezzar] made a trench searching for the old foundation deposits (...), and I found the foundation of Naram-Sin, the king of Babylon, a remote ancestor, and I did not remove his inscription, but put my own inscription together with his inscription.' (Langdon 1912: 78–79: Nebukadnezar 2; Da Riva 2008: 27)

The divine origin of the kingly task

The king's role as pious donor was ordained by his beneficiaries: the gods. According to the royal ideology that was current in first millennium BC Babylonia, the gods did not merely invent the institution of kingship but also appointed, fashioned, nurtured, and fostered the individual king (Dietrich and Dietrich 1998). His task was to create prosperity by leading the people of the land aright and by taking care of the temples and cities within his realm (Vanderhooft 1999: 34). A hymn addressed to Nebuchadnezzar II tells us that in fitting out temples and renewing the cities that contained them, the king fulfilled a wish uttered by Marduk, the chief god of the pantheon who was at home in the capital, Babylon: 'Marduk desired that Esangila and Ezida should be provided with ample means of support and that Babylon should be completely renewed' (Strong 1898: 157). This divine ordinance contained the basis of the religious programme that is so zealously reported in compositions like the Wadi Brissa rock inscription, and that is so aptly summarized in the dynasty's favourite epithet 'provider of Esangila and Ezida'. It is a common compositional strategy of the inscriptions to start with a statement about the divine ordinance of royal patronage and then to proceed with the report of an activity that proves the king's ability and success in this area (Schaudig 2001: 51).

Subtle parallels were drawn between the king as provider of earthly temples and Marduk's own role as provider of the gods' heavenly abodes. In a report of his work on the temple of Kiš, Nebuchadnezzar II asked its divine inhabitant, the god Zababa, to forward the following message to Marduk: 'Nebuchadnezzar certainly is the provider of our sanctuaries!' (Langdon 1912: 186–187: Nebukadnezar 20, III 92–93). The use of the plural is odd given that the words were to be spoken by Zababa alone. It can be explained, however, as a reference to *Enūma Eliš*, a literary work composed several centuries earlier explaining how Marduk came to gain supreme power among the gods. This work reads as a manifesto of divine and human kingship alike. After he single-handedly conquered chaos and created the world, the lesser gods proclaimed their subservience to Marduk with the following words: 'Henceforth, you (Marduk) shall be the provider for our sanctuaries!' and 'Our provider, we will exalt his name!' (Foster 2005: 467, 475). This statement defined the parameters within which the assembly accepted absolute sovereignty: their king was to be a patron of temples, and his rule was to be measured by the fulfilment of this duty. It is within this framework that we should understand Nebuchadnezzar's wish

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to be proclaimed 'provider' by Zababa in front of Marduk. Having fitted out the temple of this lesser god, Nebuchadnezzar had discharged not only his own, but also Marduk's primordial task of kingship, and the sovereignty of both could now be confirmed by their respective audiences.

King and priest at the New Year festival

There was one moment every year when the sovereignty of Marduk and the earthly king was celebrated and confirmed by gods and humans alike. This was the New Year (or *akītu*) Festival, held in Babylon at the beginning of the calendar year in the month of Nisannu. In scope, significance, and complexity, this was the most important of all Babylonian temple festivals (see most recently Zgoll 2006). It drew large crowds of spectators to the sacred quarters of the capital for the year's most pompous display of divine and human kingship. Gods from all major Babylonian cities travelled to Babylon for the occasion, convening at the Esangila temple to hear their lord Marduk proclaim the destinies of the coming year in a still obscure ritual held twice in the courtyard. The assembly at Esangila replicated the scene in *Enūma Eliš* when the lesser gods gathered to proclaim their faith in Marduk's leadership. Between the two rituals in the courtyard, the gods made a communal trip to the extramural New Year Festival house. The processions to and from that location offered the onlookers a rare glimpse of the resplendent statues of the gods that were carried along on carts and boats (Pongratz-Leisten 1994). The (human) king seized this occasion to associate publicly with Marduk by 'taking him by the hand' and leading him out of, and later back into, his Esangila temple (Black 1981). This gesture made clear to everybody present that the power of the king had a legitimate basis in Marduk's own sovereignty. In the course of the festival, the king put on display all the riches that he intended to send home with the visiting gods to their respective temples (Schaudig 2001: 527–528 no. 3.3a, IX 1'–40'), showing that he was indeed that generous 'provider of temples' asked for by the gods in *Enūma Eliš*.

Earlier in the festival, Marduk's favourable disposition towards the king had been ritually tested. This session took place between king, priest, and Marduk behind temple doors, away from the public gaze. On the evening of the 5th of Nisannu the king entered the sacred compound of Marduk where he was met by the high priest (*ahu rabû*, literally 'big brother') of Esangila. This priest first stripped the king of his royal insignia (sceptre, ring, weapon, and crown), then slapped him in the face, took him into the inner sanctuary and forced him down on his knees before the statue of Marduk, where his insignia had been deposited. In this humble position, the king made a 'negative confession' to Marduk, denying any charges of transgression (Pongratz-Leisten 1997). The list of sins offers an inversed image of the good king. Its main focus is on the ideal of pious generosity and royal protection of temple, cult, and city, concretely applied to Babylon and its Esangila temple:

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> I did not commit any sins, lord of the lands. I did not neglect your divinity. I did not destroy Babylon, I did not order its dispersal. I did not make Esangila tremble, I did not forget its rites. I did not strike the privileged citizens' cheeks, I did not humiliate them. I took care of Babylon, I did not tear down its walls. (Thureau-Dangin 1921: 144, ll. 423–428)

The priest assured the king that Marduk would bless and elevate his kingship if he truly heeded the cult and offered protection to city, temple, and people: 'He will bless you forever, he will destroy your enemies, fend off your adversaries' (Thureau-Dangin 1921: 145, ll. 445–446). After these words, the priest returned the royal insignia, fully restoring the king to his old position. Before ending the ceremony, the priest slapped the king in the face one more time, now inducing an omen: if tears rolled down his cheeks Marduk had showed himself supportive of his continued reign, if not he would cause his downfall and favour his enemies (Kuhrt 1987: 33).

This annual ceremony sheds important light on the relationship between king and priest. While the king exercised political power, the high priest of Esangila enjoyed spiritual authority. It was through the channel of this person that the king obtained proof of Marduk's approval, the only possible source of legitimate rule on earth. The figure of the priest was thus instrumental in validating royal power, as he mediated between the king and the paradigmatic sovereignty of Marduk in an annual ritual of confirmation. Particularly noteworthy is the priest's manipulation of the royal insignia, which he transferred, in the course of the ritual, from king to god and back again, herewith marking his own position as intercessor between the earthly and transcendent counterparts of kingship.

King and priest at the coronation ceremony

It has been suggested that the ritual held during the New Year Festival on the 5th of Nisannu was an annual re-enactment of the coronation ceremony (Labat 1939: 87), but we lack data on how this ceremony was actually celebrated in the time of the Neo-Babylonian kings. It is therefore difficult to determine if and how the high priest of Esangila participated in this important event. Royal inscriptions contain mostly poetical allusions to the investiture of the king: for example, 'Marduk elevated me to the lordship of the land' (Langdon 1912: 88–89: Nebukadnezar 9, I 8–9), 'Nabu placed the just sceptre in my hands to lead all the inhabited regions aright' (Langdon 1912: 112–113: Nebukadnezar 14, I 15–18). Such expressions were part of a tradition that saw the royal insignia as sacred gifts from particular gods (Renger 1976–80: 129). It is generally assumed that such phrases refer to an actual ceremony of investiture in the temple (Caplice and Heimpel 1976–80). This is largely based on the Assyrian Coronation Ritual, recorded on an Assyrian tablet from the late second millennium BC (Müller 1937), which has the *šangû*-priest of Aššur

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bestow the royal insignia upon the new king, acting on behalf of the supreme Assyrian divine couple Aššur and Mullissu, who were the 'invisible actors' behind the coronation (Labat 1939: 89). The *šangû*-priest's gesture of bestowal in Aššur's temple is of course reminiscent of the manipulation of the royal insignia by the high priest of Esangila during the New Year Festival in Babylon. This would support the idea that certain elements of the coronation ceremony had been adopted into the programme of that day.

Yet, both Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus claimed to have received their sceptre from Nabu, not Marduk, in a special temple in Babylon called E-gidru-kalama-summu 'House which Bestows the Sceptre of the Land' (George 1992: 311–312). Nabu, according to contemporary theology the son of Marduk, served as the titulary deity of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty. It is debated (Zgoll 2006: 24) whether the events in his temple at Babylon constituted a ceremony of coronation, marking the start of a king's reign, or an installation of the crown prince. More important for our present purpose is that, thanks to an improved reading of a Babylonian chronicle, we know that the king received the sceptre from a priest of Nabu (possibly the *šangû*) who was attached to the E-gidru-kalama-summu temple (George 1996: 379–380). A triangle—comparable to that embedded in the ritual conducted during the New Year Festival—emerges once again between god, king, and priest, with the last occupying the role of intercessor who negotiated the gift of kingship.

Whatever the nature of the ceremony in E-gidru-kalama-summu, there can be no doubt that Marduk's role as the source of kingship materialized somehow during the coronation ceremony. Our only concrete reference to such an event comes from a literary text, the Nabopolassar Epic, which contains a narrative about the founding of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom and the coronation of Nabopolassar (Grayson 1975b: 78–86). The epic is concerned with the military victory over the Assyrians, and shows little interest in the ritual or temple-based aspects of Nabopolassar's coronation. The locus of this story is the palace where princes, dignitaries, and courtiers are gathered for a ceremony of enthronement (Ben-Barak 1980). The scene does, however, open with a short statement that Bel (Marduk) had given the power to Nabopolassar, saying: 'With the standard I shall constantly conquer [your] enemies, I shall place [your] throne in Babylon' (Grayson 1975b: 85, III 7–8). These words remind us of the blessings uttered by the high priest of Esangila at the New Year Festival. Even though the Epic does not tell us where Nabopolassar received Marduk's words of support, it is reasonable to assume that it happened in the Esangila temple in Babylon through the agency of the high priest.

King and priest in temple worship

Blood sacrifice and offerings of vegetal and liquid substances were the central act of Babylonian religion, and it was the task of kingship to guarantee that this happened abundantly and with unwavering regularity in the main temples of the land. The Neo-Babylonian kings did not fail to stress their efforts to this effect: in their royal epithets

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they made themselves known as 'firm establisher of regular offerings' (*mukīn sattukkī*) and 'multiplier of regular offerings' (*muṭahhid sattukkī*), and in their narratives they included long lists of the various foodstuffs destined for the tables of the gods.

> I (Nebuchadnezzar) was moved to make the great regular offerings (of the gods Nabu and Nanaya) more profuse than ever before: every single day, I provided with more abundance than before the table spread of Nabu and Nanaya, my lords: an uncastrated steer, fat and fully formed, whose limbs are perfect and whose body has no white flecks; 16 fattened rams, fine specimens of the *sulumhû*-breed; together with the gods of Borsippa: two ducks; three turtle-doves; twenty *marratu*-birds; two duck eggs; two voles; a string of fish of Apsu, the pride of the marsh; profuse vegetables, the delight of the garden; rosy fruits, the bounty of the orchard; ordinary dates; Dilmun dates; dried figs; raisins; finest beer-wort; ghee; sweet meats; milk; best oil; mountain-beer; honey; ale; (and) purest wine. (George 1988: 146–147)

The idiom of the inscriptions focused exclusively on the king and left little space for mention of the priests, who performed the crucial act of sacrifice and all the accompanying rituals and prayers. Without their assistance, however, the king's well-intended piety would have been ineffective. In Babylonia, and in contrast to Assyria, the figure of the king, as provider and protector of temples, was separate from the figure of the priest, as servant of the gods in their temples. Before we explore their relationship any further, it is necessary to discuss the role of the Babylonian priest in temple worship.

Every day, in temples all over Babylonia, a multitude of priests performed the age-old worship of the gods in front of sculpted images and symbols that were erected in the inner cellas and in open shrines on the courtyard. The statues were the earthly embodiment of the gods who had chosen a particular city and temple as dwelling place. Most Babylonian temples were modelled as a miniature kingdom ruled by a divine sovereign and his consort, with their families and associates at their side or in households of their own in dependent sanctuaries nearby. In fulfilment of man's primordial obligation, the priests honoured these statues with food, drink, prayer, music, dance, and everything that was required in terms of housing, clothing, accessories, aromatics, baths, and lighting (e.g. Oppenheim 1977: 183–198). Some of Mesopotamia's best-known myths tell us that humanity had been created with this special task in mind. In the course of history, that task became the prerogative of a certain group within society. How this transfer happened was also the subject matter of stories, but only vague references to the origin myths of the priesthood remain today. According to one tradition, Marduk decreed the offices of certain priests at the very moment of creation (Al-Rawi and George 1994: 135–139). According to another tradition, all present-day diviners were descendants of an antediluvian king who had learned the trade from gods in a mythical age (Lambert 1998). The prototypical priest in literature was Adapa, one of seven antediluvian sages who were sent by Ea to bring wisdom to mankind. He was particularly skilful in the art of worship and performed the entire gamut of the priestly trade in the city of Eridu all by himself:

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> (Adapa,) pure, clean of hands, anointed one, who was solicitous after divine rites. He performed the baker's office with the baker, he performed the baker's office with the bakers of Eridu: every day he (himself) made the food and drink for Eridu('s cult). He prepared the table with his own clean hands, nor was without him the table cleared. He steered the boat, he made the daily fish catch for Eridu('s cult). (Foster 2005: 526, ll. 9–15)

In all but the smallest Neo-Babylonian temples, specialization was an important characteristic of the priestly task: worship was a collective effort and no single priest could perform the activities all by himself, as Adapa did. Careful coordination of artisans, food preparers, entertainers, and ritual specialists was all-important (Kümmel 1979; Bongenaar 1997). The question should of course be asked whether it is justified to brand such a diverse group of people with one label 'priest/priesthood' (Kuhrt 1990). Defining the priesthood is problematic not only for ancient Near Eastern specialists (e.g. Sallaberger and Huber Vulliet 2005) but for students of the history of religion in general (e.g. North 2004). In this chapter, a 'priest' will be defined as an active participant in the institutional, temple-based worship of the gods. The nature of his participation could be as diverse as purifying the inner sanctuary and baking bread. The reason why it is justified to use one term to label such different professions is that they were all organized by a single system. This system required that a person obtained a 'share', or 'prebend', in the cult before he was allowed to participate in it (see also below). A priest's share could consist of delivering or moving sacrificial resources, cooking, brewing, or otherwise preparing the various foodstuffs, arranging and presenting the food on the altar, performing rituals or even single parts thereof, manufacturing the various implements, clothes, and furnishings required during the worship, and guarding the sanctity of the building at crucial junctures of its layout. The ritual process thus required the collaboration of many hands, and the closer their proximity to the cult image the more they were drawn into the prebendary system. The highest-ranking priests, who had access to the cult image itself, held central positions within the prebendary system, while those further removed from the cult images gradually fell outside the system. The outer boundaries of the priesthood were fixed at an arbitrary point, as can be seen, for example, by the fact that there was a prebendary date gardener (*rab-banê*: Cocquerillat 1973) but no prebendary grain farmer.

As servants of the gods, the priests had access to areas of the temple that were closed for non-priests. Several zones of increasing sacredness encapsulated the inner sanctuary of Babylonian temples, and crossing these zones was an important privilege that distinguished the priesthood. The language of priests was one of 'gates' and 'entering' (Smith 1987: 49): doorsteps and gateways were decorated with texts recording their special status (e.g. Schaudig 2001: 344, no. 1.12a), expressions like 'approaching the meal' and 'entering the temple' described the most basic of priestly tasks, and the aptly named 'temple-enterers' (*ērib-bīti*) occupied the highest positions among the priests of any given temple. In fact, the entire organization of the priesthood was defined by spatiality, as priestly rank was measured in terms of proximity to the cult image (Driel 2002;

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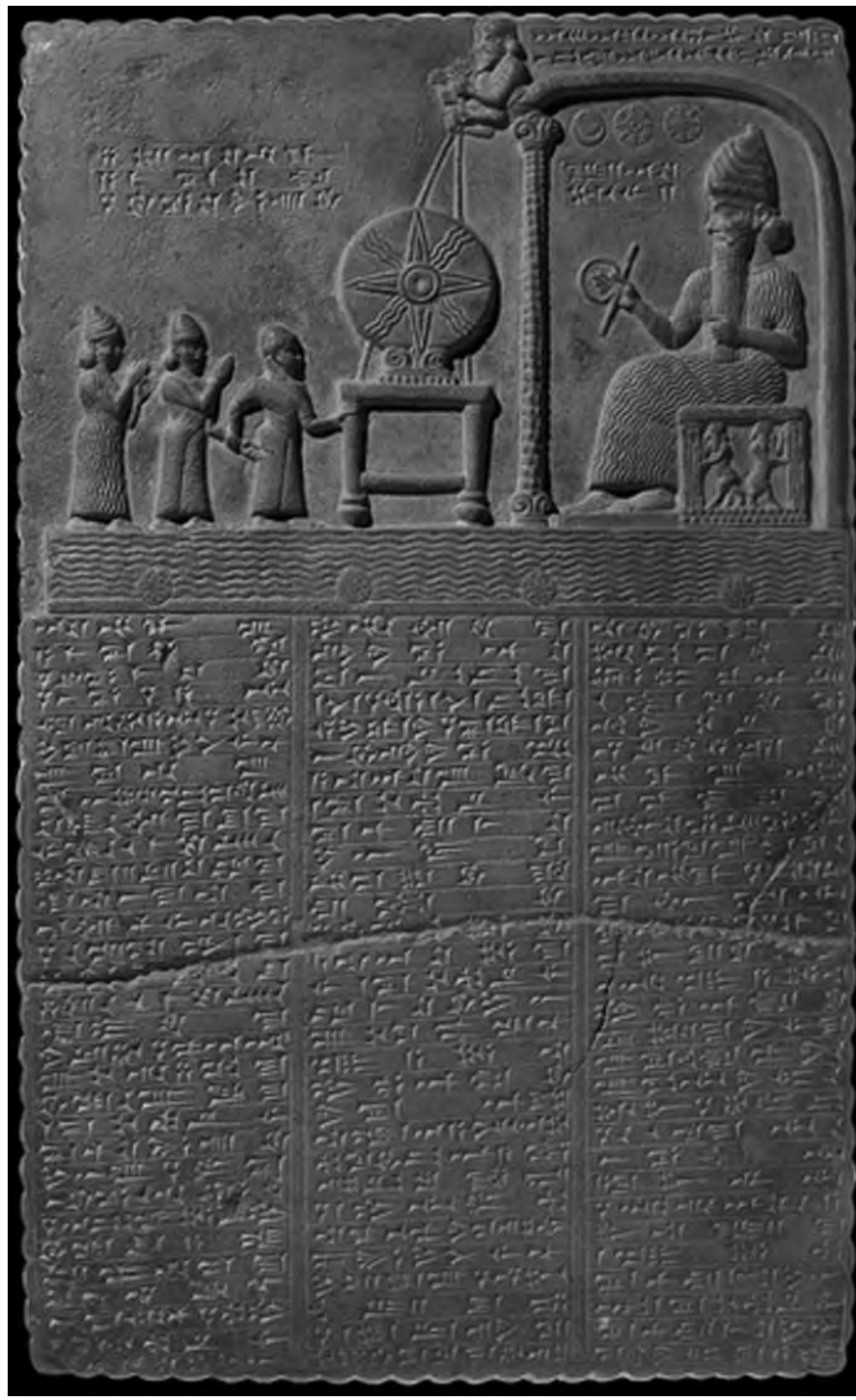

FIGURE 34.3 The Sun-god Tablet of Nabu-apla-iddina, a 9th-century king of Babylon, shown installing Nabu-nadin-šumi as temple-enterer of Šamaš (British Museum, ME 91000+). This man was the descendant of a former priest of Sippar who, 150 years earlier, had been appointed by two of Nabu-apla-iddina's royal predecessors. (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website: http://tinyurl.com/dk6w55).

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2005). In order to prevent pollution of the inner rooms, every priest who entered the temple courtyard or the more sacred areas that lay beyond had to be ritually pure, a status that pertained to all aspects of the person—body, mind, and descent (Waerzeggers and Jursa 2008). At the initiation rite this pure status was checked by a special commission of cultic experts, confirmed and enhanced with a ritual bath, and marked by shaving off all body hair of the initiate (Scheyhing 1998; Löhnert 2010).

The priests stood in closer contact to the gods than any other group in society. Even the king required the mediation and assistance of priests when interacting with the divine image. During the ritual of the New Year Festival, it was the high priest of Esangila—the foremost of the 'temple-enterers' (*ērib-bīti*)—who 'led the king into the presence of Bel (Marduk)' and took him into the temple's innermost chamber (Thureau-Dangin 1921: 144, l. 420). This gesture was an expression of the priest's position as mediator between god and king. An illustration of this same relationship can be found in the scene depicted on the so-called Sun-god Tablet of Nabu-apla-iddina, a 9th-century BC ruler of Babylon, describing his restoration of the cult image of the sun-god Šamaš of Sippar (Woods 2004): it shows a 'temple-enterer' of Šamaš grasping the king by the hand and introducing him to the refurbished image of this god (Figure 34.3).

An important distinction between the roles of the king and the priest in Babylonian temple worship emerges. The Babylonian king did not have the authority to officiate as a cultic agent: he was not a priest (Sallaberger and Huber Vulliet 2005: 624), he stood 'outside of the cult' (Labat 1939: 14). This was in marked contrast to the Assyrian king who was initiated (Löhnert 2007: 285), held priestly titles (Machinist 2006), assumed priestly roles in rituals (Menzel 1981: 159–174), and was habitually depicted in the act of sacrifice and libation (Reade 2005). The visual image of the Babylonian king was that of worshipper and temple builder (Figure 34.4), in tune with the central message of kingly piety and generosity communicated by the inscriptional works. There is no evidence that the king officiated at the altars of Babylonian temples or entered unguided into their most holy parts where the statues of the gods were erected. Even though he played a prominent role in certain temple festivals, dedicated gifts and sacrifices, and accompanied certain gods on their voyages outside the temple precincts, he still required the interceding figure of the priest when interacting with the divine image inside the temple. The right of the initiated priesthood to enter into the presence of the gods was their distinctive prerogative; the king shared this privilege only on occasions when a priest took him into the inner sanctuary.

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FIGURE 34.4 Stela from the Ezida temple at Borsippa, showing Assurbanipal, king of Assyria (r. 668–*c.* 630 BC), holding a work basket above his head, while helping in the restoration of the temple (British Museum, ME 90865 = 80-6-17, 2). A similar stela depicting Assurbanipal's brother and viceroy of Babylon, Šamaš-šumu-ukin (r. 667–648 BC), was found in the same room of the Ezida temple (British Museum, ME 90866 = 80-6-17, 3). The motif of the basket-bearing king has a long history in southern Mesopotamia, with roots reaching back to third-millennium BC Sumer. (Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum, from the museum's website: http://tinyurl.com/3wc7av3).

The king as protector of temples and priests

As guarantor of cultic continuity, the king fulfilled an important protective function towards the temples and their priests, who knew the rules of religious observance and maintained the life-giving presence of the gods by serving their cult statues. The good king facilitated the work of the priests by respecting their rights, securing their positions, and enabling the continuation of their hallowed traditions. Various literary works can be found in the archives of temples and priests across first-millennium BC Babylonia that focus on the relationship between king, temple, and priest. These works often have an anecdotal or historiographical character and address

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their topic by projecting conventional interpretations of the 'good king' or the 'bad king' onto rulers of the recent and distant past. Such texts were composed in a variety of genres, ranging from 'fake' letters and monuments, to pamphlets, prophecies, historical epics, and chronicles (e.g. Al-Rawi and George 1994; Beaulieu 1993; Grayson 1975a; 1975b; Cavigneaux 2005; Foster 2007). Some of the best-known literature of the era belongs to this group, such as the Verse Account of Nabonidus, which, within a generation of his demise, accuses this king of disrupting the traditional cults (Schaudig 2001: 563–578; Kleber 2007 on its composition date) and the Chronicle of Early Kings, which links the downfall of past dynasties to the improper cultic behaviour of their kings (Grayson 1975a: no. 20; Cole 1994: 227 n. 25; George 2003: 59). Even in the case of a well-documented figure such as Nabonidus, it is extremely difficult to disentangle historical fact from pure ideological projection in these texts (Kuhrt 1990; Machinist and Tadmor 1993; Beaulieu 1995b), but as statements of what was expected of the ideal king in terms of cultic behaviour, these sources are unmatched (Weitzman 2004).

One of the most famous examples is a composition known today as *The Crimes and Sacrileges of Nabu-šuma-iškun* (Cole 1994). This king of Babylon reigned in the mid-8th century BC, but the text may have been written generations, even centuries, after his death. The only extant copy (Weiher 1984) comes from the library of the *āšipu* Anu-ikṣur in Hellenistic Uruk (see Robson in this volume) and dates from about half a millennium after the purported events. The text accuses the king of sacrilege against the cults of Babylon, Borsippa, Cutha, and Uruk:

> He detained Nabu in Babylon, and he turned Festival Vigil and Festival Day into one day. He covered the fine garment of Nabu with the fine garment of Bel of the month Šabaṭu. Dressed as the latter, he proposed Bel's marriage to Tašmetu [a].
>
> Unshaven, he mutilated (the fingers of) his apprentices, and wearing fine gold, he entered the inner sanctuary of Bel offering [...]. He brought leek—a thing forbidden in Ezida—to the temple of Nabu and gave (it) to the temple-enterers to eat [b].
>
> He made Ea, god of wisdom, whose seat was founded with pure heaven and earth, get up from (this) seat befitting his great divinity and makes him reside in the 'Exalted Gate' of Bel. He removed Madanu (and) Bel of Babylon, his favourite god, and sent (them) down. Without the authority of [...in] this city, he does as he pleases. She who sits on a throne [...] (referring to the goddess Ištar of Uruk). He unleashed seven lions and [...] allowed to roam freely [c].
>
> Year by year, he increased the killing, pillaging, murdering, and forced labour upon them (the citizens of Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha) [d].
>
> He took the possessions of Esangila, all that the kings who preceded him had brought into it, gathered (them) in his palace and made (them) his own: silver, gold, precious gems of exceedingly high value, and every divine appurtenance that there was. He made offerings with them as he wished to the gods of the Sealand, Chaldea, and Aram. He adorned the women of his palace (with them). He offered them to Syria and Elam as gifts [e]. (Cole 1994: 234–236)

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Whether Nabu-šuma-iškun ever committed these crimes is uncertain (Cole 1994; Beaulieu 2001). He reigned during a particularly unstable period of Babylonian history, and contemporary sources indicate that he was a weak king unable to control his territory and governors (Brinkman 1968: 224–226; Lambert 1968: 124–130; see also below), but there is no proof that he was guilty of any serious transgressions. More interesting than the historical truth behind the text is *how* the king is depicted: his portrait basically inverts the conventional role of the Babylonian king (Weitzman 2004: 225). Instead of protecting the continuity of the cult, he disrupts it: he changes rituals [a], dislocates the statues of the gods [c], and spends resources on unprecedented gods [e]. Instead of protecting the priests, he usurps their role [b]: by entering the inner sanctuary of Bel to perform sacrifice, he acts as a 'temple-enterer', while his unshaven status and wrong garb clearly should forbid his entry. He even prevents those who are competent, the actual 'temple-enterers', from fulfilling their rightful tasks by degrading them to a state of impurity—temporarily, by forcing them to eat taboo food, and permanently, by mutilating the fingers of the young apprentices, who as the initiated had to have perfect bodies and could therefore never take up office. He abolishes the protected status of the citizens of Babylon, Borsippa, and Cutha [d], committing precisely one of the crimes mentioned in the king's annual confession to the high priest of Esangila during the New Year Festival ritual (see above). Finally, he inverts the very ideal of kingly generosity by not giving, but taking property from the temples of Babylonia and by distributing it as gifts to foreign peoples, who under normal circumstances should contribute to the wealth of Babylonian temples instead of receiving it.

A similar critique of kingship is found in the so-called *Uruk Prophecy*, a literary text from the same Seleucid Uruk archive. The ideal king of this text, loosely based on the example of Nebuchadnezzar II (Beaulieu 1993), should restore the abolished rites of the local cult, return displaced cult statues, dedicate to the service of the godhead its own priests, and rebuild temple and city. In short, that king was to be a protector of the cult and of its priesthood, and he would conform to the ideal of kingly generosity. The negative appraisal of Šulgi, king of the kingdom of Ur at the turn of the third to the second millennia BC, in another literary work found in the priestly milieu of Seleucid Uruk embraces the same ideology of kingship:

> Šulgi, king of Ur, pillaged the treasury of Esangila and Babylon, (but) he completely refurbished Ekišnugal, the temple of Sin at Ur. He built the walls of Ur and made the foundations of Ur firm. (…) The ordinances of the cult of Anu, the rites of Uruk, the secret of experts, he changed improperly, and assigned them to Sin, lord of Ur. (Hunger 1976: no. 2; Cavigneaux 2005: 64–65)

Among the usual crimes of not respecting the established rites of religious observance and pillaging temple property, Šulgi is said to be guilty of favouring a second-rate temple above the main sanctuary of Babylon. This crime is inspired, clearly anachronistically, by Nabonidus' favouritism of the Ekišnugal temple of Ur (Cavigneaux 2005), which disrupted the traditional gifting pattern among the temples of Babylonia that had been established by the exemplary Nebuchadnezzar II.

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The king as judge of priestly performance

The king's role of protector of temples and priests brought with it the duty to guarantee correct observance of the cult and take action if disruptions happened at temple level. It was a constant matter of concern that the delicate chain of labour that integrated the efforts of the various priesthoods into a single gesture of worship would break up and cause dissatisfaction among the divine recipients (Ambos 2007). Every single priest was therefore held responsible for the quality and timely delivery of his own share, and several layers of supervision were provided to guarantee the continuous performance of the collective (e.g. Kessler 1991: 84, 95). This hierarchy of responsibility transcended the temple level and converged upon the king himself, who was the ultimate guarantor of regular worship. Concretely, this meant that the king had to take an active interest in the arbitration of cultic negligence (Beaulieu 2003: 129–130, 168–169, 175; Kleber 2008: 68–71). The Neo-Assyrian kings were kept informed by letter of any irregular, negligent or criminal behaviour displayed by priests (Cole and Machinist 1998: nos. 25, 26, 47, 128, 134, 138), and we must assume that the Babylonian kings maintained similar lines of communication, but we lack the actual correspondence. Yet there is a Neo-Babylonian literary text that relates specifically to the duty of the king to protect temples from incompetent priests. It is an apocryphal letter purportedly written by the Old-Babylonian king Samsu-iluna (r. 1749–1712 BC) in which he accuses the Babylonian priesthood of sacrilege:

> I have heard reports (that) the temple enterers, the collegium, the *nêšakku*-priests, *pašīšu*-priests and *digirgubbû*-priests of the cult-centres of the land of Akkad (i.e. Babylonia), as many as there are, have taken to falsehood, committed an abomination, been stained with blood, spoken untruths. Inwardly they profane and desecrate their gods, they prattle and cavort about. Things that their gods did not command they establish for their gods. (…) On account of evil behaviour and the abomination of the gods, destroy them, burn them, roast them, (…) make their smoke billow, bring about their fiery end with the fierce flame of the boxthorn! (Al-Rawi and George 1994: 135–138, ll. 7–12)

The letter paints a rare picture of the ideal priest: he was a modest, truthful, pure, and devoted servant of the gods. As in *The Crimes and Sacrileges of Nabu-šuma-iškun* (see above) this portrait is created by means of inversion and projection onto the past. The letter was part of the Neo-Babylonian school curriculum and found in various Babylonian temple archives (Gesche 2000; Beaulieu 2007). As priestly literature, the letter's harsh condemnation of the priesthood is surprising, but as pious literature—interested in sketching the ideal interactions between king, temple, and priest—the letter celebrates the traditional role of the king as agent of cultic continuity like the other examples cited earlier: thanks to king Samsu-iluna's firm intervention, the temples were saved from utter ruin at the hands of the corrupt priesthood.

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Prebends and the authority of the king

Earlier in this chapter, we have seen that all priests owned rights in the cult. In modern research these rights are called 'prebends', adopting a term from ecclesiastical history to translate Babylonian *isqu* 'share, allotment' (Driel 2002: 33). The roots of the prebend system go back to the second millennium BC (Driel 2002: 45–52), and it remained in use until the Seleucid period (Corò 2005); there is a particularly rich documentation for the Neo-Babylonian period (Bongenaar 1997). In many respects, prebends were a type of property and could be inherited, sold, exchanged, pledged, and leased according to customary property law (Oelsner, Wells, and Wunsch 2003). On the other hand, the prebend was a ticket to the priesthood, which, in turn, was subject to purity regulations. Only those who were qualified could perform the cultic task to which the prebend lent access. Chief among these qualifications was the requirement to be the son of a former initiated priest (Waerzeggers and Jursa 2008). Other conditions of access, such as bodily wholesomeness and mental balance, depended on accidental factors and could not be predicted or controlled. As a result, Neo-Babylonian priests strongly maintained that only certain families could rightfully hold office in a given temple. For example, all temple brewers in Nippur claimed descent from a single eponymous ancestor, Absummu (Joannès 1988: 90; Beaulieu 1995a: 88); in this way they distinguished themselves from other types of priests who appealed to other reputable ancestors (Borger 1973: 172; Lambert 1998: 142–143, 149). In court cases, disputes, and petitions, priests regularly advanced inheritance and descent as arguments in defence of their rights. At a more general level, even a quick glance at the Neo-Babylonian archives will reveal the remarkable tenacity with which families managed to maintain their positions in any given cult in Babylonia. The strength of these ties was the result of the dual force of the inheritability of prebends—the 'tickets' to the priesthood—and descent regulations (as a controllable condition of access), both aiding the continuation of the paternal family.

In view of the fact that prebends were intimately linked to membership to the priesthood, the question of who allocated the prebendary rights is crucial: the figure of the king looms large here. For the sake of argument, we can distinguish three phases in the lifespan of a prebend: its creation, its transfer, and its suspension or removal. In all three phases the king played a decisive role. Starting with the first step—the creation of a prebend—it was the king's exclusive right to endow a temple with (new) cultic personnel. He did this by granting income to the temple and setting it aside as remuneration for the new priest. In this way, a 'share', or prebend, was created. Several such grants survive today (surveyed by Driel 2002: 70–74). All examples date from before the rise of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty but this may be coincidental. The texts are found on stone monuments, known as *kudurru*s, and on clay and stone tablets that may be attributed to the same genre depending on how it is defined (Brinkman 2006).

With one exception, it is always the king who appoints the new priest and this exception is by itself revealing of the exclusive right of the king. In a unique and entirely

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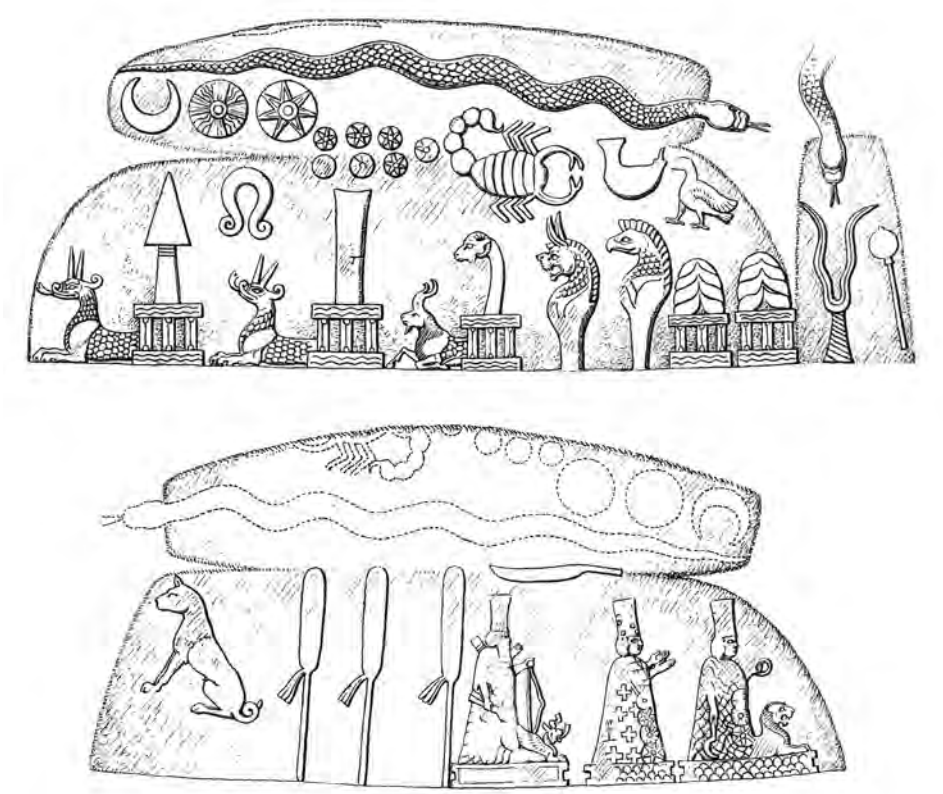

FIGURE 34.5 Stone monument depicting the gods Nanaya and Mar-biti appointing a new priest for Nabu's temple at Borsippa (VA 3031). Nabu-mutakkil, a relative of the powerful 8th-century BC governor of Borsippa, is introduced as temple-enterer of Nabu. The reigning king of Babylon, Nabu-šuma-iškun, is mentioned in the date of the inscription but not in the traditional role as the appointer of the priest, a role in which the local gods Nanaya and Mar-biti are cast instead. This unconventional arrangement should probably be seen in the light of an ongoing power struggle between the king of Babylon and the governor of Borsippa. (Reproduced from Delitzsch 1907: no. 36).

artificial set-up, an 8th-century BC *kudurru* (Figure 34.5) tells us how the gods Nanaya and Mar-biti, the second- and third-ranking deities of the pantheon of Borsippa, introduced a new temple-enterer into the service of their lord Nabu in the Ezida temple of Borsippa (Delitzsch 1907: no. 36; Thureau-Dangin 1919: 141–144). No king was present to claim a stake in this solemn moment; it is presented as an exclusive affair between the gods and priests of Borsippa. This arrangement is without parallels; how can it be explained? The monument's historical background is illuminating. Its inscription dates it to the reign of Nabu-šuma-iškun, king of Babylon, who inspired the story of doom told in the already discussed composition *The Crimes and Sacrileges of Nabu-šuma-iškun*. There is no historical proof for any of the accusations made in this text, but we do know that the authority of this king was challenged in Borsippa, where the local governor

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Nabu-šuma-imbi usurped several of the king's traditional functions, including fighting off enemies, restoring social justice, rebuilding the Ezida temple, and composing a royal-style votive inscription which forms the source for this information (Lambert 1968). The king's absence from the Borsippa monument should be seen in the light of this power struggle. It is no coincidence that the new priest was a member of the governor's own family; this was a sign of his growing local support and popularity. By casting the gods Nanaya and Mar-biti in the nominating role, however, the actual king's absence was obscured. This, in turn, shows that the appointment of priests was seen as a prerogative intimately linked to the office of kingship. Usurping this privilege was going one step too far, even for an ambitious warlord like the governor Nabu-šumu-imbi.

Prebends were passed on by inheritance to the male descendants of the royal appointee. Even though they could be sold, exchanged, or otherwise alienated, transmission within the family was the favoured practice at all times. As a result, the social composition of the priesthood remained stable, and the kings, as initiators of the chains of transmission, had great control over the social dynamics of the priesthood. They did not monitor the transfer of prebends as such, but by levying a tax on the initiation rite, they kept track of who was active in which local cult (Waerzeggers and Jursa 2008). In times of unrest, when royal protection of temples was weak, it could happen that priests lost their rights in the cult. We know several examples of priests who petitioned for the restoration of their positions. The arguments put forward in these cases are interesting because they show us how priests perceived the legitimacy of their rights. In the Sun-god Tablet of Nabu-apla-iddina already discussed and similar texts (Da Riva and Frahm 1999–2000) the petitioner's main argument is his claim to descend from someone appointed by the king, thus combining two sources of legitimation: paternal descent and royal patronage.

At the end of a prebend's hypothetical lifespan, the king played again the decisive role by removing targeted priests from office, or suspending their posts (Frame 1991). Such measures were politically sensitive and happened in exceptional cases only. *The Uruk Prophecy* warns about the unfitting replacement of the priesthood: it is a bad king who assigns to a godhead new priests not belonging to it, it is a good king who respects its honoured servants. This and similar statements show that there was a limit to the king's right of appointment. Between a deity and its priest existed a supernatural bond that no king should undo without good reasons. When the king appointed a new priest, the approval of the gods was ascertained by means of extispicy (Löhnert 2007), and we must assume that similar precautions surrounded the removal of a priest from office. As a result, the enthronement of a new king did not normally affect the priesthood; political change had an effect mainly on temple management functions (Bongenaar 1997; Kleber 2008). The priestly families provided stability against the temporality of the power of the king. When in the early 7th century BC a legitimacy crisis erupted among the priests of the Eanna temple of Uruk—some of whom had been appointed by the Babylonian king Marduk-apla-iddina II and his son, and others by the Assyrian king Sennacherib (Dietrich 1967–68: 227–228)—this confusion was symptomatic of the instability marking the politics of that period (Frame 1992).

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The merits of the king

The aim of the king's beneficence was to earn the blessings of Marduk and the other gods worshipped in the temples of the land. In formal prayers, attached to the official reports of their pious deeds, the Neo-Babylonian kings expressed their hopes to be granted a long life, abundant offspring, a stable rule, military success, and eternal fame. As a more tangible reward of their generosity, they enjoyed the honour of sharing in the meals of the gods. Every major temple sent sacrificial leftovers to the king in carefully arranged baskets (Beaulieu 1990; Kleber 2008), and a text from the 9th century BC contains the details of how these leftovers were to be divided between the king and the local priests, who were also entitled to a portion of the divine meal (McEwan 1983). Sharing food was only one of several activities that marked the special bonds between god, king, and priest. Certain rituals can be interpreted in this way, not least the temple episodes of the coronation ceremony and the New Year Festival discussed earlier in this chapter. Both the initiation rite of priests and the coronation rite of kings contained elements of the 'mouth-washing' ritual performed at the consecration of the statues of the gods (Berlejung 1996; Walker and Dick 2001: 10–11). As the embodiment of human perfection, both kings (Machinist 2006: 173–174) and priests (Borger 1973) were comparable to the gods. In addition to its religious dimension, the presentation of sacrificial leftovers to the king had a political function. With this gesture, the temples and their priests expressed their recognition of a new king (Driel 2002: 69; Scurlock 2006: 44–45), and delegations bearing such gifts played a key role in the negotiation process that took place between the people of Babylonia and the kings after conquest or usurpation (Kuhrt 2007).

Another kind of merit given to the king as benefactor of temples was the cult of the royal image (Cole and Machinist 1998: xiii). Statues of the king were erected in the courtyards and inner rooms of temples, and were provided with food offerings and prayer. There are only a handful of cuneiform texts from the Eanna temple in Uruk and the Ebabbar temple in Sippar that may attest to this practice in the Neo-Babylonian period (Kleber 2008), but the cult of the royal image had been performed in Mesopotamian temples at least since the third millennium BC (Winter 1992; Cole and Machinist 1998: xiv) and there is no reason to doubt that the practice continued under the last native kings of Babylon and even beyond. These statues are thought to have enabled a constant transmission of the king's piety and worship of the gods venerated in a given temple. At the same time, as recipients of offerings, these statues were clearly the subjects of worship themselves (Machinist 2006). This dual aspect of the king's statues stimulates an ongoing discussion in modern research about the divine status of Mesopotamian rulers (e.g. Holloway 2002: 178–193; Winter 2008). The placement of the royal statue in close proximity to the gods should in any case be seen as a testimony to the special bond between god, king, and priest; it served not only 'to reinforce the hierarchical order that privileges the ruler through its very presence in the shrine' (Winter 1992: 32–33), but also to reinforce the privileges of the priest through his access to the sculpted images of both god *and* king.

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Conclusions

Kings, priests, and gods were closely tied together in a triangular relationship. The kings derived their legitimacy from their association with the gods, and this relationship was negotiated through the temples and their priesthoods, who played a vital role in validating the power of the individual kings. In turn, the temples were sustained by resources allocated by the kings, whose judicial and military authority provided the additional security and stability required for the smooth functioning of the cult. The gifting patterns of the Neo-Babylonian kings reflected prevailing theological and political dependencies, with the Esangila and Ezida temples of Babylon and Borsippa, respectively, taking centre stage.

The legitimacy of the priests' rights was closely linked to the office of kingship. It was the king's exclusive right to appoint priests, but his freedom to appoint was checked by the transcendent bond that existed between the gods and their chosen servants. The social stability of the priesthood formed a counterweight against the temporality of royal power. There is evidence that the kings forged and fostered personal ties with the priesthood by appointing members of the royal family to priestly positions and contracting marriage with established priestly families. The development of the relationships between king, temple, and priest under the non-native dynasties after 539 BC may constitute an avenue of future research.

Further reading

A short introduction to the history of the Neo-Babylonian kings can be found in Da Riva (2008: 2–18) with references to recent secondary literature. The origins of Nabopolassar and the roots of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty are elucidated by Jursa (2007). There are a number of book-length studies on the reigns of particular kings, namely Nebuchadnezzar II (Arnaud 2004; Sack 2004), Neriglissar (Sack 1994), and Nabonidus (Beaulieu 1989); the respective articles in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 9 (1998–2001) are very useful as well. A richly illustrated exhibition catalogue (Finkel and Seymour 2008) focuses on Babylon during the Neo-Babylonian period.

The publication of the Neo-Babylonian text corpus is ongoing; Jursa (2005) surveys all presently known administrative and legal archives up to the Parthian period and provides bibliographical references. Foster (2007) gives an introduction to the literary compositions of first-millennium Mesopotamia. The inscriptions of the first-millennium kings of Babylon prior to the Neo-Babylonian Empire have all been edited by Frame (1995). Vanderhooft (1999) and Da Riva (2008) offer useful introductions to the corpus of Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions (as well as to Neo-Babylonian royal ideology). The most comprehensible, if outdated, edition of Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions remains Langdon (1912); only the inscriptions of Nabonidus are available in a modern edition (Schaudig 2001). For the chronicles of the reigns of Neo-Babylonian kings see Grayson (1975a) and Glassner (2004).

A survey of Mesopotamian, including Neo-Babylonian, priesthood is provided by Sallaberger and Huber Vulliet (2005). For the interaction between king and priest see Kuhrt

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(1990), who raises fundamental questions about the independent political power of the priesthood and its nature. The most recent study of Neo-Babylonian temple–palace relations is Kleber (2008). The key studies of the Neo-Babylonian prebend system are van Driel (2002; 2005).

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CHAPTER 35

CUNEIFORM CULTURE'S LAST GUARDIANS: THE OLD URBAN NOTABILITY OF HELLENISTIC URUK

PHILIPPE CLANCIER

The Hellenistic period in Babylonia began on 21 October 331 BC with Alexander the Great entering Babylon in triumph. After the Parthians conquered the eastern parts of Mesopotamia in 141 BC the region was no longer part of a Greek kingdom, despite the attempts of the Seleucid rulers Demetrios II in 140 BC and Antiochos VII in 130–129 BC to reclaim their lost territory. However, the last known cuneiform document written in Uruk dates to as late as 108 BC (Kessler 1984), so when discussing this city in the Hellenistic period in this chapter, we will also include the early years of Parthian rule in Babylonia.

Uruk (Figure 35.1) is an ideal setting for the study of cuneiform culture at that time. It has yielded sizeable quantities of primary evidence, parts of which were unearthed during carefully documented archaeological excavations that provide the archival context for the text finds. The surviving sources for studying Hellenistic Uruk are almost exclusively clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform script. They were produced by professionals called by the Akkadian term *ṭupšarru*, denoting a scribe writing cuneiform on clay tablets. Cuneiform script was still used by the ancient Mesopotamian temples, and as the shrines in such cities as Babylon and Uruk were centres of religious, economic, and political power, the *ṭupšarru* was more than a simple scrivener: he was a representative of the traditional urban notability. The clay tablets also provide us with information on another type of scribe, the *sepīru*, who used leather scrolls as his writing material (Clancier 2005). The term is often translated as 'parchment scribe' but as parchment is a very specific leather medium, which is not documented in Hellenistic Babylonia at all, I will avoid this incorrect term. While no actual leather scrolls have survived from Hellenistic Uruk, the *sepīru* and his activities are reasonably well known from clay tablets, which portray him as a key link between the temples and the civil administration

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FIGURE 35.1 The remains of the Ešgal temple at Uruk in spring 2001. (Photo by Eleanor Robson)

and justice system (McEwan 1984). The *sepīru* was not part of the old urban notability and did not use the cuneiform script; his preferred language was Aramaic and/or Greek.

This chapter will focus mainly on three separate but related aspects of scribal activity in Uruk during the Hellenistic period. After presenting a brief survey of the textual sources available for Hellenistic Uruk and highlighting the importance of writing materials for our topic, I will discuss the cuneiform scribe (*ṭupšarru*) as a representative of the old urban notability in the context of that specific social group and its links to the temples and the Hellenistic kings. We will then turn our attention to the legal activities of both the cuneiform scribe and the alphabet scribe working on leather (*sepīru*) and the closely related role of the Babylonian temples as courts of justice. As the question of the relation between languages and writing media is of key importance for the period, I will conclude with a discussion of the interaction between alphabetic and cuneiform cultures by focusing on the so-called Graeco-Babyloniaca.

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The textual sources and their archaeological context

The numerous clay tablets surviving from Hellenistic Uruk (Figure 35.2) can be grouped into two different categories. The first consists of various archival materials, about 700 legal documents, administrative texts, and letters, while scholarly tablets form the second group, of which about 750 tablets survive (Oelsner 2003: 287). This impressive

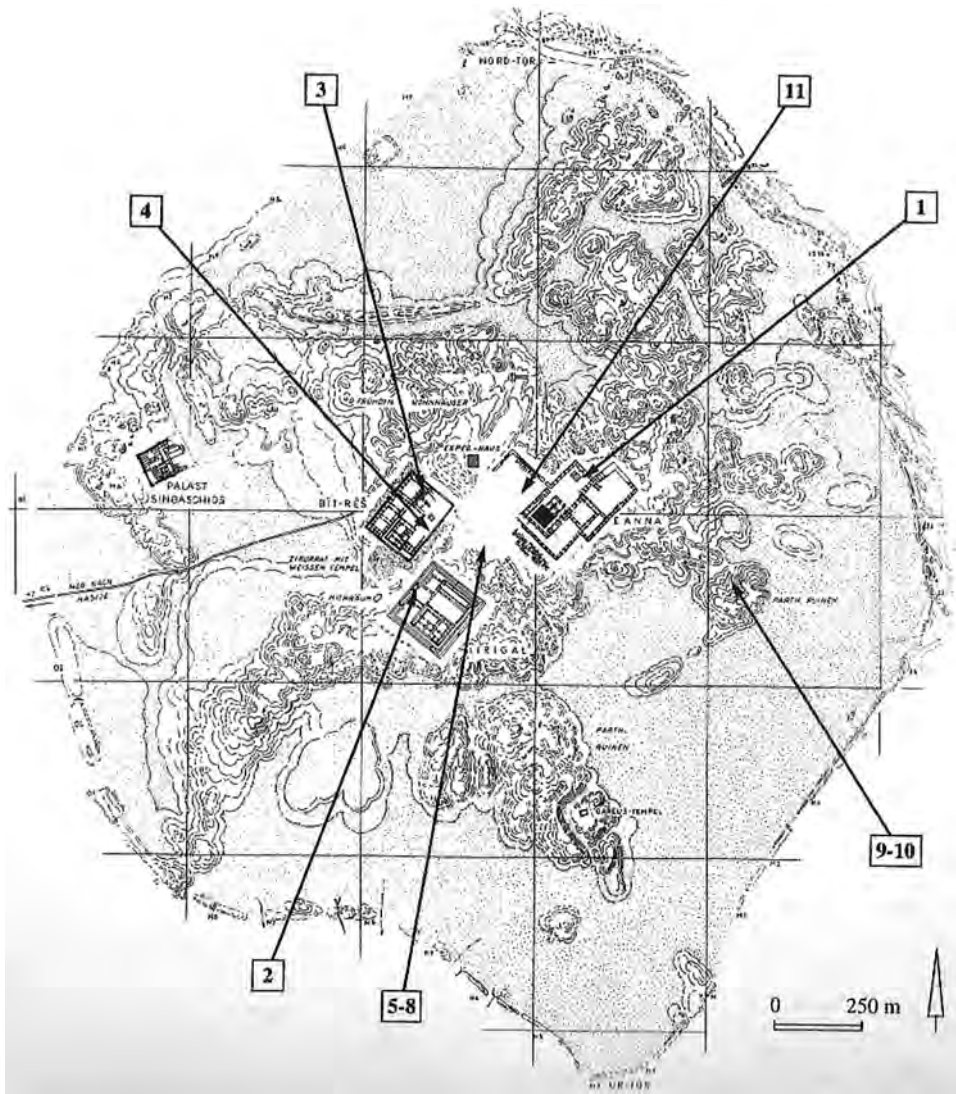

FIGURE 35.2 Map of Uruk, showing the position of the Hellenistic archives (nos. 2–4, 10, and 11). (Reproduced from Pedersén 1998: 207, Plan 98, with permission of CDL Press)

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documentation was unearthed from particular archaeological contexts, which must be considered when studying the tablets.

After the city of Uruk was first explored in 1849 by W.K. Loftus, who also conducted brief excavations there, no systematic archaeological investigations followed for many decades . However, numerous clay tablets were unearthed by illegal excavations throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries and acquired by museums such as the British Museum, the Ashmolean, and the Louvre. Their original archaeological context is thus unknown. The rest of the available material was discovered during the extensive excavations conducted by German archaeological missions, dispatched first by the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft and later by the German Archaeological Institute together with Iraqi colleagues, from 1912 to 2002.

The Hellenistic tablets from Uruk that have a clear archaeological context are not very numerous. The two official excavation areas that yielded tablets are situated in the temple quarter of the city, which is dominated by the two main sanctuaries: the Reš temple, dedicated to the god Anu, and the Ešgal temple of the goddess Ištar (Oelsner 1986: 146–149, 152–162). The library containing the archive of the lamenters (Akkadian *kalû*, see Löhnert and Ziegler in this volume) was unearthed in the Reš temple in 1959–60 and 1969–72 (Hoh 1979; Dijk and Mayer 1980). Two more tablet assemblages were found in a private house, occupied successively by two different families. One dates to the late Achaemenid period (early 4th century BC) and the other covers the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC (Clancier 2009: 47–81; Robson in this volume). Both tablet collections were used by exorcists (Akkadian *āšipu*, see Schwemer in this volume) working for the Reš and Ešgal temples (for whose importance in the Hellenistic period see Spek 1985; 2006). The texts are re-edited in the online *Corpus of Ancient Mesopotamian Scholarship* http://oracc.org/cams. Modern scholars tend to divide textual sources into archives and libraries (Pedersén 1998; Jursa 2005), with archives consisting of legal documents, administrative texts (in Hellenistic Uruk only a few such texts survive from the Reš temple, see Beaulieu 1989), and letters, and libraries consisting of scholarly texts. But in reality both categories of texts are often found together and this was the case with the tablets of the exorcists and lamenters of Hellenistic Uruk.

Writing materials and text survival

All these texts are written in the Akkadian or Sumerian languages and in cuneiform script, sometimes supplemented by short Aramaic epigraphs in alphabetic script. Akkadian had been the main language of Babylonia for centuries but this was no longer true in the Hellenistic period. Since at least the 7th century BC the most common language had been Aramaic. Persian had always had limited impact in Babylonia, while the extent to which the Greek language was used after Alexander's conquest in 331 is still a matter of debate (Geller 1997; Westenholz 2007). But for us, the key aspect

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is not a language's popularity but the writing materials used to record it, as this dictates its survival. Leather and papyrus do not survive for long in the Mesopotamian soil and therefore very little Aramaic language material has been preserved, despite the fact that we can safely assume that Aramaic was commonly spoken. What little remains is recorded on stone or clay, either on pottery or on pottery sherds (ostraca) or on clay tablets. But the latter were used as a writing material only in exceptional cases, and the explanation for this is simple: while the cuneiform script is ideally suited for writing on the soft clay surface, resulting in the survival of a wealth of cuneiform documents in the shape of virtually indestructible clay tablets, this is not the case for the alphabetic Aramaic and Greek scripts which are meant to be drawn with a pen. For these scripts, a flat surface to write on is far better suited than a soft one to incise into, and writing materials such as leather and papyrus were therefore much preferred to clay to record them. But not a single such document has survived. Both alphabetic and cuneiform scripts were also recorded on wax-covered writing-boards, which survive only rarely: while earlier examples are known, especially from Assyria (see below) we do not have any such object, in either alphabetic script, from the Hellenistic period.

The question of textual survival is crucial when studying Hellenistic Babylonia. The thousands of clay tablets unearthed in various Babylonian cities form a sizeable and impressive set of evidence, but this must not distract us from the fact that what survives is just a very minor part of the written output of this period. Texts in Aramaic and Greek certainly formed the bulk of the original documentation. Further, using cuneiform script in the Hellenistic period was not a neutral act: each cuneiform text, whether legal or scholarly, was written in a very specific social, cultural, and even political context. The use of the cuneiform script was, in itself, a signifier of the members of the old urban notability of Babylonia (Beaulieu 2006): cuneiform texts focus on the concerns of this social group and were written by and for its members. Therefore, although working on the history of Hellenistic Babylonia with the cuneiform sources entails using almost all of the available local texts, in reality we are dealing with only a very small and very specific share of the documentation originally written in this period.

The ancient urban notability and the Babylonian temples

Uruk was the main city of southern Babylonia. It grew throughout the second half of the first millennium BC, so that by the Hellenistic period it was the same size as it had been in its heyday in the third millennium BC, a settlement with a diameter of 3 km. In this important economic and political centre the rulers of the Seleucid dynasty had a strong ally and intermediary for executing and delegating their power, in the form of the old urban notability.

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These traditional great families of Uruk, whose members used the cuneiform script extensively as an expression of their identity as the holders and preservers of ancient Mesopotamian culture, defined themselves by tracing their origins to a prestigious ancestor who can often be identified as a historical personage of the late second millennium BC. Typically, a person's name was given along with his father's name, followed by that of the family ancestor: for example, Anu-belšunu, son of Nidintu-Anu, descendant of Sin-leqe-unninni (Pearce and Doty 2000). This form of identification provides an important historical tool, as the range of Akkadian personal names used in the Hellenistic period is quite limited, and homonymy (different persons sharing the same name) occurs frequently. The ancestor in our example, Sin-leqe-unninni, was thought to be the compiler of the canonical version of the *Epic of Gilgameš* (Beaulieu 2000). His descendants were typically lamenters in temple service. Other families seem, in the same way, to have specialized in particular professions. For example, the descendants of Ekur-zakir were often exorcists and sometimes also astrologers. Many descendants of Ah'utu held administrative responsibilities in the temple and sometimes also the city. There is a strong correlation between specific families and the area of their professional expertise (Doty 1977). The strong link between the city of Uruk and these ancient families was highlighted by the designation they used for themselves—'son of Uruk' (*mār Uruk*), just as members of notable families in the other Mesopotamian cities would refer to themselves as 'son of Babylon' etc. In the colophons of scholarly tablets, this term is replaced by the simple designation 'Urukean' but it is likely that this term was reserved only for the members of the old urban notability. For Babylon, it can be shown that the designation 'Babylonian' was the exclusive privilege of the individuals forming the temple assembly (Clancier 2007: 30), and the case may be similar in Uruk.

This small social group existed long before the arrival of the Greeks in Mesopotamia as can be seen from the example of the activities of the clergy of Eanna, the main temple of the city (Jursa 2005: 138–139, for an introduction to the archives and further bibliography). It exercised a great deal of power, both political and economic. Those representing the temples in cultic, legal, and administrative matters profited both in material terms and in status (Beaulieu 1989: 54–55). The temples owned extensive property in various city quarters, alongside the Harriṣu canal, and at the Adad gate and the Šamaš gate. Many of these houses and estates were occupied or used by the members of the notability (Del Monte 2000). The temples also owned sizeable cattle herds and large parcels of fields around Uruk and in other parts of Babylonia. Again, the members of the notability profited from them: the partition of temple revenues—namely, income attached to clerical titles called prebends—and houses, as well as food rations, is documented in the legal texts issued by the Ešgal and the Reš temples (Corò 2005).

In the Greek sources, the members of the ancient urban notability are collectively described by the term 'Chaldaeans', and it was the Chaldaeans who welcomed Alexander into Babylon after his eastern campaigns (Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, xcv). These Chaldaeans ran the city administration and constituted the community of Babylonian scholars, priests, and temple administrators. When, therefore, I refer to urban notables,

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members of the clergy, or scholars in this chapter, we should have this very same group of people in mind.

The ancient urban notability as the guardians of cuneiform culture in Hellenistic Uruk

What was the exact place of ancient cuneiform culture in Uruk, and in Babylonia more generally, during the Hellenistic and Parthian periods? While Jean Bottéro and Samuel Kramer saw it as struggling for survival since the Persian conquest of Mesopotamia in 539 BC (Bottéro and Kramer 1989: 40), I would argue, at least in some respects, for the opposite view. Although native Mesopotamian culture, characterized by the use of the Akkadian language and the cuneiform script, was no longer dominant, and certainly not widespread, it was still powerful. Its guardians, the 'cuneiform scribes' (*ṭupšarru*), or, to use the Greek term, the Chaldaeans, were able to carve out and retain a dominant position in society for themselves.

The decreasing use of the cuneiform script can be traced in four stages. Until the 6th century BC, cuneiform and the Akkadian language still dominated the documentation of state, temple, and private business in Babylonia. The Persian conquest of 539 BC brought about a decisive change as cuneiform was no longer used by the state administration. By the 3rd century BC, cuneiform was no longer used by those with no clear links with the temples, and between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD the use of cuneiform ceased altogether (Cooper 2008).

Is it surprising that the members of the old Urukean families were able to maintain their traditional culture, including the use of cuneiform, during the Hellenistic period when it was no longer dominant in the rest of country? Is their high social status in the community surprising? Looking back at Babylonia's situation in the early first millennium BC, when the region was under Assyrian domination, provides a context and an answer. At that time, the Babylonian cities found themselves under the leadership of the clergy of the main temples, best illustrated by the correspondence between the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC) and the chief administrator (*šatammu*) of Babylon's Esangila temple, dedicated to the city god Marduk (Landsberger 1965). The same situation can be observed in 539 BC: a building inscription of Cyrus the Great from Esangila, known today as the Cyrus Cylinder (Kuhrt 2007: 173–176, 181–183), shows the clergy in support of the new ruler; and as we have already seen, Alexander the Great received the same support in 331 BC (Beaulieu 2006).

Rulers who were not themselves 'on site' were in need of local and ideally native intermediaries to execute their power, and the Chaldaeans, with their economic stability and local policy experience, were perfectly suited for that purpose. In turn, this situation gave them the great advantage of a profitable, if locally limited, autonomy, which also allowed them to maintain and foster their traditional culture.

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The ancient urban notability and the Hellenistic rulers

The notables' relations with the Hellenistic rulers are the key to understanding the good health in which the small 'cuneiform community' found itself between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC. This relationship is clearly expressed in a building inscription of the time of Seleukos II (r. 246–226 BC) from the Reš temple in Uruk:

> In the month Nisannu of the 68th year (of the Seleucid Era), Seleukos (II) being king, Anu-uballiṭ, descendant of Ah'utu, the governor of Uruk, to whom Antiochos, king of the countries, had given Nikarchos as his second name, restored and finished (details of the restoration works at the Reš temple). (Clay 1915: no. 52)

This is an interesting source in many respects but we will focus on three aspects which illustrate the economic power of the temple and the close relationship that the clergy of Uruk entertained with the Seleucid monarchy at this time.

The first point is simple but crucial: the inscription highlights the ability not only to maintain the temples of the city in good condition but also to enlarge them substantially. This is confirmed by the results of modern excavations, which show that the god Anu's ziggurat, built in this period, and the Reš temple were among the largest temple complexes ever erected in Mesopotamia, while the old Eanna ziggurat was still well maintained (Kose 1998: 93–196, 257–268).

The second point concerns the political organization of the city and its surroundings. Anu-uballiṭ Nikarchos holds the title of *šaknu ša Uruk*, which denotes the chief administrator of an entire city: it is the only case where we can demonstrate that a governor's background was in the temple clergy. Later, at the end of the 2nd century BC, another official title is attested in Uruk (Doty 1988: 98) and Nippur (Joannès 1988), which also seems to combine temple authority with responsibility for the city administration: (*rab*) *ša rēš āli*. Francis Joannès (1988) proposed to translate the complete title held by Anu-uballiṭ Kephalon, another member of the Ah'utu family who was active during the reign of Antiochos III (222–187 BC), as 'chief of the clergy of the Uruk temples' (*rab ša rēš āli ša bīt ilāni ša Uruk*, McEwan 1982: no. 42). This makes good sense both in Uruk and Nippur, and as the clergy belonged to the old urban notability, we might assume that the responsibilities of the *rab ša rēš āli* included also some, if not all, aspects of the city administration.

The third point, which demonstrates a link between Uruk's old notability and the Seleucid king, is the second, Greek name Nikarchos, bestowed on Anu-uballiṭ by Antiochos. It remains unclear whether the king in question was Antiochos I (r. 281–261 BC) or Antiochos II (r. 260–246 BC), but the inscription makes it plain that Anu-uballiṭ received his Greek name as a direct gift from the monarch. This source offers the only attestation of such a practice and it is not possible to specify what the procedure behind this was—more specifically whether the king met Anu-uballiṭ in person on the occasion, which remains a distinct possibility. In any case, the importance of this leading figure of the Urukean temples to the king and in the city administration emerges very clearly.

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The use of double names is well attested in Uruk. Most of the individuals in question had two Akkadian names, but the tendency to take a second name in Greek increased markedly throughout the Hellenistic period (Sherwin-White 1983). With Anu-uballiṭ Nikarchos and Anu-uballiṭ Kephalon, we have already encountered two leading figures of the Reš temple who had both an Akkadian and a Greek name. The second of them, as Uruk's head temple administrator, was surrounded by members of his family in the service of the Urukean temples, among whom we find a Timokrates (McEwan 1984). This branch of the Ah'utu family, which is separate from that of Anu-uballiṭ. Kephalon, seems to have been relatively Hellenized if we can trust the evidence of the names. It is possible to identify twenty-six individuals belonging to this branch of the family, of whom fourteen bore Greek names: Kephalon himself, for example, was married to Antiochis, daughter of Diophantos, and two of their children are known, Diophantos (probably the elder son) and a daughter Belessunu (a Babylonian name). By contrast, Anu-uballiṭ Nikarchos was the only one to have a Greek name in his branch of the Ah'utu family. The Greek names as a marker of Hellenization appear in a very specific context which must not be interpreted as a general desire of the members of Uruk's ancient notability to adopt a Greek way of life. Although we have cuneiform texts dating to as late as 108 BC in Uruk, the evidence suggests that the practice of using Greek names ceased around 130 BC, just a decade after the Parthian conquest.

Two other examples illustrate the respect shown by the urban notability to Seleucid royal power and its involvement in state affairs. First, throughout the Hellenistic period and into the Parthian period, the cuneiform scholars of Babylon wrote chronicles which partly focus on kings and state policy (Finkel and Spek 2006–). Second, the urban notability may have adapted the so-called ruler cult of the Hellenistic kings to suit local customs (Linssen 2004: 124–128), although this is still a matter of debate among modern scholars. Indeed, the question is to know if, during the second half of the period of Seleucid rule in Babylonia, the clergy of the traditional temples agreed to make a cult of the royal family, besides their normal cultic activities. The evidence is not abundant: there are only three relevant sources, one from Babylon and two from Uruk. The text from Babylon is a chronicle of the reign of Seleukos III (r. 225–223 BC) which mentions a 'ritual (*dullu*) of king Seleukos and his sons' (Glassner 2004: 254–255; collated by the author). From Uruk, two legal documents refer to royal cultic statues and sacrifices to them (Clay 1920: no. 36 = Corò 2005: 395–398; Schroeder 1916: no. 16 = Corò 2005: 357–359). The first informs us that:

> Illut-Anu, whose second name is Ina-qibit-Anu, son of Anu-mukin-apli, descendant of Anu-mara-ittannu, leather scribe (*sepīru*) of the estate of Anu, (sold) by his own free will his prebend (consisting) of parched grain of the house of Nidintu-Ištar: a ram's shoulder, innards, [...] and thirty Dilmun dates which are presented on the offering table of Anu on the 27th day of each month; his prebend of parched grains of the house of Nidintu-Ištar which is presented on the offering table of the statues of the kings on the 27th day of each month.

This and the other, similar Uruk text date to the reign of Antiochos III (222–187 BC), when the ruler cult was expanded throughout the Seleucid kingdom (Ma 2000). But for

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Babylonia the question remains whether these are references to a novel cultic practice or to an ancient Mesopotamian tradition, which is attested especially well in the late third and early second millennia BC, with the deification and worship of the kings of the cities of Ur or Isin being the most prominent examples (Linssen 2004: 126). While Sargon of Akkad (r. 2334–2279 BC) had a cult in Sippar at least until the beginning of the 5th century (Bongenaar 1997: 230 and n. 205), this seems to be more in the vein of a Greek hero cult than a ruler cult. Moreover, it was a northern Babylonian tradition, and among the 750 or so surviving legal and administrative tablets from Uruk there is no reference to any kind of ruler cult before Antiochos III: the practice seems to have been abandoned for centuries (Linssen 2004: 126). As delicate as it is to build theories on so few clues, we must bear in mind that the three texts mentioned open up the possibility of a ruler cult during the second half of Seleucid dominion in Babylonia. At the very least, there is no sign that such a cult would have been resisted in any way: indeed, it would have provided new economic opportunities for the clergy, as the kings would have given estates and cattle to the temples in order to provide for the regular performance of sacrifices.

The old urban notability tried to please the political powers, and their cultic activities are no exception. As we have seen in the case of Anu-uballiṭ Kephalon, local autonomy was the reward for this loyalty. In addition, the kings paid, directly and indirectly, for the maintenance and restoration of the temples, as did Antiochos I (r. 281–261 BC) in the case of Ezida, the temple of Nabu, the city god of Borsippa (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1991). The kings also made offerings during the main Babylonian cultic festival, both for their own life and good health and those of their family (Linssen 2004: 127–128; Boiy 2004: 277–287). This patronage of cultic and, as we shall see, scholarly activities allowed the old Mesopotamian temples to remain the main cultic and cultural centres in Babylonia's principal cities throughout the Hellenistic period. Indeed, the quick disappearance of the Reš and Ešgal temples at the beginning of Parthian domination could be seen as evidence that the local population was little involved in the old religious practice, whose last flowering in the Hellenistic period was the result of the old urban notability's close relationship with the Seleucid monarchs.

This relationship was not limited to matters of cultic practice but also included the royal patronage of scholarship. Here, the evidence is better for Babylon than for Uruk: Itti-Marduk-balaṭu, son of Iddin-Bel was sent by the temple assembly of Esangila, Babylon's main shrine, to king Hyspaosines of Characene, at that time ruler of Babylonia (r. 127–124 BC), as his astrologer (Clancier 2007: 33–34). While there is no earlier evidence for such a situation it is quite possible that other Seleucid kings also had Babylonian and Urukean astrologers in their service: these two cities were, after all, the most prestigious astrological centres of Babylonia, and Babylonian astronomy and astrology had an excellent reputation across the entire Mediterranean world (for example, see Pliny, *Natural History* 6. 121–122).

To conclude, the Hellenistic period was not a time of withdrawal and difficulties for the old urban notability of Babylonia, the guardians of cuneiform culture. As long as the link to the Greek elite and especially the Seleucid rulers remained strong, the small community of *ṭupšarrū* or Chaldaeans continued to thrive. Locally autonomous, the temples

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were centres of cultic activity but also, and perhaps more crucially from a royal perspective, very effective organs of administrative and judicial power.

Legal, administrative, and scholarly texts: Writing media and their significance

The temple is at the centre of Hellenistic cuneiform documentation (Spek 2006). It was the main institution to keep legal, administrative, and scholarly tablets and its affairs constitute one of their primary subjects. Analysis of the documents and their media allows us to gain some insight into the relative representativeness of a text or text group. As a document written on a clay tablet, a writing-board, or a leather scroll did not have the same significance, an awareness of the hierarchy between these records enables us, for example, to reconstruct the organization of the temple administration or to determine whether particular legal transactions were recorded only for internal temple use or not. The differences immanent to the choice of writing medium highlight the restrictiveness of the use of cuneiform script as well as the capacity of the clergy, the old urban notability, to adapt to new situations.

The choice of writing medium is closely connected to the script but also the purpose of the text. Clay and leather were put to different uses, with a sharp distinction between scholarly texts and legal documents. Scholarly texts deriving from traditional cuneiform culture and used by the temple clergy were transmitted in the Akkadian and/or Sumerian languages and recorded in the cuneiform script, overwhelmingly on clay tablets. There are only two references to scholarly texts of the cuneiform tradition recorded on leather. A colophon on a clay tablet from Babylon (Leichty 1970: 200–201) mentions that the continuation of the text, omens from the series *Šumma Ālu* ('If a city') and *Šumma Izbu* ('If an abnormal birth'), is to be found 'on a leather scroll' (*magallatu*). Likewise, a commentary on the 25th and 26th tablets of *Šumma Ālu* is also said to be on a *magallatu* (Weidner 1966: 40). Whether the text was written in cuneiform or in alphabetic script, in Aramaic or even in Greek, remains unclear, and modern authors disagree on the question (Clancier 2005: 92–93; Westenholz 2007: 278–279).

The situation is quite different for legal documents, such as prebend contracts on clay tablets, which are well attested in Uruk (Corò 2005). Most are well-written documents on beautifully shaped tablets, in a cuneiform script quite different from the much more casual signs used in administrative contexts (Beaulieu 1989). With the seals of the legal parties impressed on the tablet, and the presence of witnesses and the date of the transaction recorded, these contracts have all the necessary components of valid legal texts. However, in addition to these objects created by the 'clay tablet scribe' (*ṭupšarru*), several references attest the existence of leather documents written by the 'leather scribe' (*sepīru*).

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A key difference between scholarly and legal texts is that the first were used only by the clergy, while legal documents had to be valid not only in the eyes of the temple authorities but also in the eyes of the civil authorities, which means that Greek officials needed to be able to read them. Several different terms for documents recorded on leather are attested in cuneiform: we have already encountered the term *magallatu*, which is only attested for scholarly texts; the term *giṭṭu* (written with the logogram ^{kuš}GÍD.DA) was used for most legal documents, while *šipištu* referred to letters. The logogram for leather (KUŠ) was normally placed before these terms in order to specify the writing medium but it could be replaced by the logogram for clay (IM) on occasion in order to express the fact that the document in question was a clay tablet.

A number of texts from Babylon, including chronicles, Astronomical Diaries, and the memoranda (*tahsistu*) issued by the Esangila assembly, refer to such leather documents. At least some of these memoranda were recorded on leather and used in legal procedures, as is shown by a legal text (McEwan 1981: 72–73) which mentions 'a copy of a memorandum on leather of (personal name)' (GABA-*ru* ^{kuš}*tah-sis-tu*$_4$ *šá* PN). The Seleucid kings sent letters written on leather to the temples, as can be seen from a passage in the Chronicle of Seleucus III: 'By order of the king, according to the leather letter of the king'(*ina* KA LUGAL *lìb-bu-ú* ^{kuš}*ši-piš-tu*$_4$ *šá* LUGAL, Glassner 2004: 254).

In addition to the scholarly texts, which were used by the clergy in a temple context, and the legal documents, which had to be legally acceptable and accessible to state officials, there are administrative documents, which recorded the affairs of the temple administration, essential to manage the institution but without legal validity. At Uruk, a few such texts are known for the Reš temple (Beaulieu 1989): they record the temple inventory for certain years but not, at least as far as the surviving sample shows, on a regular basis. They tend to look like rough drafts and seem to be hastily written, using a cursive script which is difficult to read as the signs lean heavily to one side: this script distinguishes them instantly from the beautifully written legal and scholarly texts. Perhaps these inventories were only secondary copies of texts originally recorded on another writing medium, which is well attested in the Reš and Ešgal temples for administrative purposes: the writing-board. This also seems likely in view of a formula used frequently in prebend contracts: 'As long as PN wants, he will keep his name on the register (*lē'u*) of the estate of Anu' (Clay 1920: no. 15). The basic meaning of the term *lē'u* (usually written with the logogram ^{giš}DA) is 'writing-board'—that is, a wooden tablet covered with wax which had the same qualities as soft clay and could be used to record cuneiform script. Our formula seems to indicate that such writing tablets were the most commonly used writing medium for administrative purposes. Unlike clay, wax can always be softened and the text easily changed, which makes the writing-board unacceptable for legal texts. But as administrative documents had no legal function the fact that this writing medium was corruptible was less problematic. While no writing-board survive from Hellenistic Babylonia there are some earlier Assyrian examples from Kalhu (modern Nimrud) and Assur (Wiseman 1955; Klengel-Brandt 1975) that give a good indication of the physical shape of these objects.

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The writing-board is a medium that is situated between scripts and text genres. In Hellenistic Babylonia, two genres were recorded on writing-boards: administrative documents (just discussed), and scholarly texts. While the writing-board was perhaps not ideally suited for scripts designed to be drawn with a pen rather than incised with a stylus, its use for writing alphabetic scripts is well attested: Greeks and Romans used it extensively and it is extremely likely that it was also used for Aramaic. We have already discussed its use for recording cuneiform, for which it is attested from the late third millennium BC (Steinkeller 2003); in terms of writing technique, clay tablets and writing-boards had so much in common that it was possible to copy text from one to the other without difficulty. This transfer is especially well documented for scholarly texts, not least in Uruk: numerous clay tablets mention that the cuneiform text in question was 'copied from an original writing-board' in their colophons (for an example see Hunger 1976: no. 90).

To conclude, there was a clear hierarchy in the writing media used in Hellenistic Uruk. From a legal perspective, the most important medium was leather, inscribed in alphabetic script, as it was readable and acceptable to the Greek authorities and moreover difficult to corrupt. The other medium employed for legal purposes was the clay tablet, impossible to corrupt but, while perfectly acceptable for internal temple business and transactions within the small community of Uruk's old urban notability, difficult to present before a royal court. Finally, the writing-board was used only for administrative and scholarly matters. Therefore, as the script favoured and used whenever possible by the urban notability of Uruk was cuneiform, it is unlikely that this scribal community was solely responsible for managing the city's public affairs. Who, then, was in charge of that?

The role of the 'leather scribe' (*sepīru*)

Uruk's old urban notability, defined as it was through its relation to the temples, was not the only literate group. As we have already seen, another writing professional is attested in this city (as well as in Babylon): the *sepīru*. These 'leather scribes' were not part of the old Babylonian nobility: while the notables, including the 'clay tablet scribes' (*ṭupšarru*), consistently referred to their prestigious ancestors, the leather scribes did not (McEwan 1981: 30). But they were well integrated in the temple organization and recognized as important persons: they appear in contracts as witnesses and legal parties, and we have already encountered the case of a leather scribe selling a temple prebend (Clay 1920: no. 36).

The *sepīru* is known in Babylonia from the Neo-Babylonian period (626–539 BC) onwards. The term itself is Aramaic in origin (simply meaning 'scribe') and we may therefore assume that it was his task to write in the Aramaic language and script. While earlier attestations are written syllabically, from the early 2nd century BC onwards, the term is regularly written with a new logogram, ^{lú}KUŠ.SAR, which literally means 'scribe

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writing on leather', mirroring the traditional logogram for *ṭupšarru:* lú DUB.SAR 'scribe writing on clay'. The use of this new spelling may have no significance but it could express the fact that from that time the *sepīru* also wrote in the Greek language and script.

Because the leather scribes do not use the name of a remote ancestor to identify themselves, their families are more difficult to reconstruct than are those of the notables. So far, four main kinship groups in Hellenistic Uruk can be traced in reasonable detail: the families of Nidintu-Ištar, Arad-Ninurta, Ištar-hiṭu'a, and Illut-Anu (Clancier 2005: 99–102). Less well documented are the families of Ina-qibit-Anu and Anu-belšunu. All families are identified here by their earliest known ancestors.

According to the available documentation, some leather scribes were paid by the temple, with houses or prebends just like the notables. Two texts (McEwan 1982: nos. 30, 31) show that the Reš temple employed at least six leather scribes simultaneously, implying a high level of leather document production at the temple. Indeed, the *sepīru* was a very important cog in the wheels of Uruk's Hellenistic bureaucracy, as he linked two powers, the ancient local notability and the Seleucid monarchy. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that legal texts written in cuneiform on clay tablets were duplicates of original leather documents: 'These written documents (i.e. the clay tablets of a prebend sale, issued for the two parties) are copies of a leather document (kuš*giṭṭu*) which was made in the month Ayyaru (April–May) of that year (i.e. one month before the cuneiform tablets were written)' (McEwan 1982: no. 24; cf. Clancier 2005: 86–88). There are various other attestations of contracts on leather in the legal texts from Uruk and, in one telling case, the *sepīru* Illut-Anu had received his copy of a contract on leather (Clancier 2005: 91 n. 29), presumably because he had no competence in reading cuneiform, while the notables involved had copies on clay, which are the only copies that have survived for us to study today.

There are several possible reasons for the use of different writing media for the same legal documents, but there was one key reason for writing in an alphabetic script, whether Aramaic or Greek (for it remains unclear which of these languages was used in which legal contexts during the Hellenistic period; see also below). Civil judicial courts had to be able to use the documents. It is therefore not a question of why write on leather but rather why write on clay (and therefore in cuneiform). Even if clay tablets were meaningful to the temple authorities, why draw up a text in an additional language and script when the production of an Aramaic (or Greek) version was compulsory?

We propose three main reasons. First, cuneiform clay tablets were valid before the temple court. Second, as we have mentioned, the cuneiform contracts are very well written and presented (also compared to those from Babylon), so it may also be possible to see these scribal masterpieces as the products of scribal and scholarly training (Robson 2008). This is not to say that they are nothing but writing exercises, but employing the ancient Babylonian legal tradition in Akkadian and cuneiform for real cases would have been a good way of preserving it and certainly preferable to making virtual exercises or even losing the tradition altogether. Third, clay tablets may have suited administrative practice: completed leather documents were wrapped up and

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sealed, so that in order to read them the sealing had to be broken, which compromised their legal validity. In this respect, clay tablets were more accessible and hence more useful: they were sealed around the edges without obscuring the text, which remained visible and therefore legible. In other words, clay tablets offered a quick way of checking data. Earlier periods of Mesopotamian history provide parallels for this interpretation. For example, Old Babylonian contracts consisted of an inner tablet and an envelope, which was inscribed with a copy of the legal text of the inner tablet: this text could be checked without breaking the envelope and hence rendering the document invalid (see Taylor in this volume).

Babylonian temples as courts of justice

Whatever the relevance of a cuneiform document outside the temple, there is no doubt about its importance before the temple court. Unlike in Babylon, documents recording past procedure (*tahsistu*) are unknown in Uruk, but such information can be found in legal texts, especially prebend sale contracts. The following text is a good example:

> [Anu-uballiṭ], son of Nanaya-iddin, son of Anu-aba-uter, descendant of Luštammar-Adad, by his own free will sold forever to Anu-aha-iddin, son of Nanaya-iddin, descendant of Hunzu, for one third of a mina of refined silver, (in) staters of Seleukos (i.e. Seleucid coinage) in good condition, for its full price, one thirtieth of the prebend of 'having access to the house of secret knowledge and the goldsmith's craft' (*ērib bīti pirištūtu u kutimmūtu*) of (the gods) Anu, Enlil, Ištar, Nanaya, Belet-ša-Reš and one twelfth of (the prebend of) Anu, Papsukkal, Belet-ṣeri, Šarrahitu and all the gods in their shrines: (prebends) which were those of Libluṭ, son of Nanaya-iddin, and of Anu-iqišanni, his son, and which have now come back, following a 'written document' (*graphê*), to Nanaya-iddin, his father, in the year 103 (of the Seleucid Era = 209 BC). Before Kephalon, the chief of the clergy of the city (*rab ša rēš āli*) of Uruk, Anu-belšunu, the overseer (*paqdu*) of Uruk, Timokrates, their brother, (all) sons of Anu-balassu-iqbi; Anu-aba-uṣur, the temple paymaster; Labaši, son of Ina-qibit-Anu, Anu-ahhe-iddin, son of Kidin-Anu, and Nidintu-Ištar, son of Anu-mara-iddin, (all) leather scribes of the estates of Anu. (McEwan 1982: no. 42; cf. McEwan 1984)

This text illustrates several aspects of the judicial responsibilities of the temple courts. Most obviously, members of the Ah'utu family headed both the court of the Reš sanctuary and the entire temple: Anu-uballiṭ Kephalon, as *rab ša rēš āli*, acted here as the responsible member of the assembly receiving the complaint (McEwan 1984), assisted by his brothers Anu-belšunu and Timokrates. The court further encompassed the temple paymaster and three leather scribes. This text illustrates the power of the Ah'utu family in the temple and, consequently, in the city of Uruk. Moreover, it provides an interesting context for the activities of the leather scribes: there is no mention at all of a cuneiform writing specialist in the temple court as all its members, with the exception of

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the leather scribes, were cuneiform literate. The only writing professionals were the leather scribes, whose role in this court seems to have been first, to attest to the legal validity of leather documents in the manner of court clerks and second, to draw up the final document which was to be valid not only in the temple but also before civil courts. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that, after the trial, a specific document was produced, which was designated by the generic Greek term 'written document' (*graphê*, represented in syllabic cuneiform as *kur-ra-pe-e*, as first recognized by McEwan 1984: 240–241). Even though the case was judged before the temple court, the final verdict resulted in the production of a document that was valid in Greek law. While it is difficult to define the precise nature of such a document our source attests to the leather scribes' ability to write valid legal documents in Greek.

Finally, we need to consider the competences of the temple court: was it authorized to decide matters not directly related to temple affairs? There is no easy answer to this question in the Hellenistic period. Both in Uruk and in Babylon, the legal documentation concerns only trials which appear to be closely related to temple business. But according the so-called Judicial Chronicle from Babylon (Joannès 2000), the court of the Esangila temple was able to pass the death penalty, which implies a high level of judicial authority. However, the matters recorded concern temple affairs, especially sacrilegious offences. Yet we have to factor in the distorting quality of the cuneiform documentation: we might argue that only cases closely related to the temple merited the drawing up of a cuneiform clay tablet. I remain open to the possibility that the temples, at least in Uruk, held some civic responsibilities even though there is no proof of this at present.

Cuneiform culture in Hellenistic Babylonia

This discussion of writing professionals, writing media, and written languages has highlighted the importance of the relationship of the old urban notability of the traditional Babylonian centres with the Seleucid (and later Parthian) state and Greek civil society for the maintenance of cuneiform culture. We turn, finally, to its extinction.

The scribal and scholarly activities of the Chaldaeans can be described as conservative to an extent. A number of canonical series of cuneiform compositions, compiled at the end of the second millennium BC, continued to be regularly copied until the very end of the cuneiform tradition. These include the most important divination series such as *Šumma Ālu* ('If a city') for omens in the natural world, *Šumma Izbu* ('If an abnormal birth') for abnormal births, and *Enūma Anu Enlil* ('When Anu and Enlil') for celestial divination as well as the medicinal series *Sakkikû*. But Hellenistic cuneiform culture was also creative and dynamic and this is most visible in the field of astronomy, and especially mathematical astronomy (Robson 2008; Rochberg and Steele in this volume).

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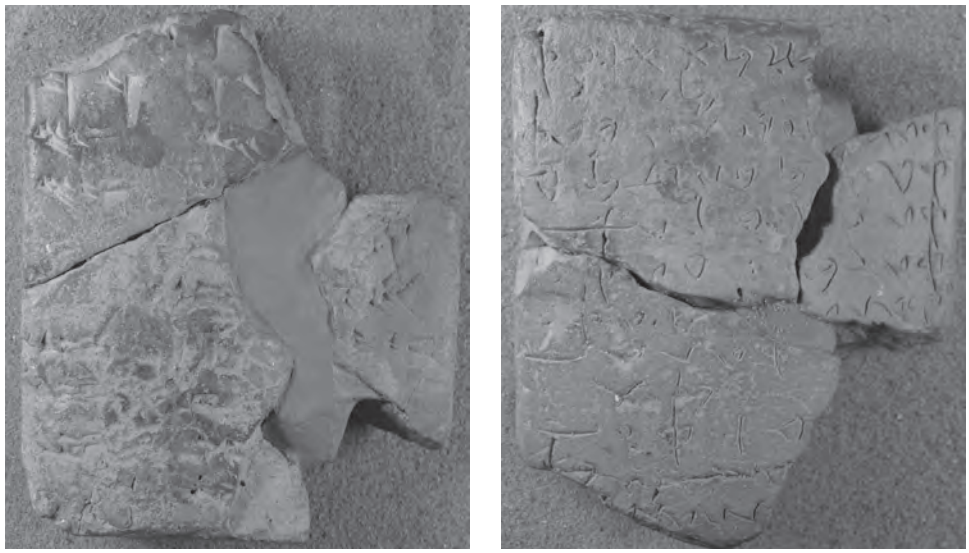

FIGURE 35.3 Graeco-Babyloniaca tablet, with Sumerian and Akkadian words for 'canal', written in cuneiform and in Greek alphabetic script (British Museum, BM 34797). (Photo by Frans van Koppen. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

The question of education is essential when trying to understand how the traditional cuneiform culture may have reached persons outside the limited community of the ancient urban notability and also when discussing its end. The two known libraries of the exorcists of Uruk (Robson in this volume) highlight that the transmission of the old Mesopotamian scribal culture was based on copying cuneiform texts in a domestic context. But source material known hitherto only from Babylon shows that other ways of learning were also in use. The Graeco-Babyloniaca (Figure 35.3) are clay tablets which are inscribed in two distinct ways—either in Greek only or with a combination of Akkadian or Sumerian cuneiform and alphabetic Greek, a phonetic transcription of the cuneiform text. To explain this phenomenon, three different hypotheses have been proposed. The first sees them as evidence for mother-tongue Greek speakers' desire to learn the Akkadian and Sumerian languages in cuneiform (Sollberger 1962). The second argues that they show an attempt to transfer Akkadian and Sumerian textual content to leather documents by means of a script far better suited for this purpose than cuneiform (Geller 1997). The third claims that they are the school exercises of students who were already well versed in the Greek script and were now turning to Akkadian and Sumerian in cuneiform (Westenholz 2007).

Although the first hypothesis remains attractive, there is otherwise little evidence that the Greek population of Babylonia wished to learn cuneiform: the two communities, the native Babylonians and the Greeks, seem to have led separate lives. This is perhaps best illustrated by the foundation of Babylon as a Greek *polis* (Boiy 2004: 109), whose citizens

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were clearly not identical with the old Babylonian urban notability. Moreover, not a single Greek is attested in any scholarly pursuit amongst the tablets from Babylon and Uruk. But the main argument against this hypothesis is a linguistic one: as argued by Knudsen (1995: 136), Aramaic dialectal features in the Akkadian texts, and vowel representation in the Greek texts that is best explained by parallels in Arabic, suggest that the writers of the Graeco-Babyloniaca, despite using Greek script, were native speakers of a Semitic language.

The second hypothesis—that the Graeco-Babyloniaca provide evidence for the attempt to represent the Akkadian and Sumerian languages in Greek script in order to preserve the Mesopotamian scholarly corpus on leather—is equally attractive. But the proposition is somewhat countered by the fact that writing cuneiform in ink is of course possible and even attested, although this was apparently never a widespread practice. One such example is an inked colophon on a 7th-century clay tablet from the Assyrian king Assurbanipal's library at Nineveh (DT 273 + K. 10100; for a photo see Reade 1986: 217, Fig. 2). A library tablet from the Assyrian city of Huzirina has a colophon that was incised into the dry tablet with a stylus as if it were written in ink—that is, by drawing the outlines of the individual wedges of the cuneiform characters (Gurney and Finkelstein 1957: no. 56). If we turn to Hellenistic evidence, then perhaps those scholarly compositions which are said to be recorded on a leather scroll (see above) could be seen as evidence for the writing of cuneiform on leather although this is very speculative. There is no persuasive reason to believe that these texts were not simply written on their leather scrolls in Aramaic script, except for the assumption that it may be challenging to begin a text in one language and script and finish it in another. It is highly unlikely that omens could have been simply translated without problems as they are dense with technical vocabulary for which there are no obvious counterparts in other languages: historical studies of scientific/scholarly translation in other contexts—for example, Greek into Arabic, Arabic into Latin—shows that it can take several generations to domesticate technical terminology and syntax into the target language (Montgomery 2000). There is also at least one known clay tablet recording Aramaic not in alphabetic script but in cuneiform (Thureau-Dangin 1922: no. 58), so, in the end, anything is possible.

The last hypothesis—that the Graeco-Babyloniaca were used by the Greek-literate in order to learn cuneiform—is presently most popular. It is a plausible enough scenario that some members of the old urban notability were already competent writers of Greek before learning cuneiform. If we accept this interpretation, then it attests, even more than the Greek personal names used by Chaldaeans, a certain level of Hellenization amongst the Babylonian elite.

However we interpret the Graeco-Babyloniaca, there is no doubt that Babylonia was cosmopolitan and multilingual during the Hellenistic and Parthian periods, perhaps most visibly in the communities of the old urban notability of Babylon and Uruk. Although they defined themselves through their maintenance of traditional cuneiform culture, including the perpetuation of Akkadian and Sumerian, they spoke Aramaic as their mother tongue and Greek when dealing with the state authorities (Geller 1997: 45).

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Further reading

For the last two decades now, numerous studies have focused on the last period of cuneiform culture. Since the publication of McEwan (1981), the overall approach to the study of the Hellenistic period has changed, especially concerning the Hellenization of Babylonia, which is now considered far less important than was previously thought. The perception of late cuneiform culture has changed fundamentally, too, since the days that (for example) Bottéro and Kramer (1989) judged it as deeply conservative and essentially provincial. And modern scholarship has stressed its impact on the outside world: to give but two examples, Beaulieu (2006) demonstrated the importance of Babylonian culture in the Hellenistic world, while Rochberg (2004) highlighted the influence of Mesopotamian astronomy and astrology in the Mediterranean world. Van der Spek (2006) deals with the role of the temples and Boiy (2004) with the city of Babylon during the Hellenistic period. Since 2007, the research project 'The Geography of Knowledge in Assyria and Babylonia', led by E. Robson and S. Tinney (http://oracc.org/gkab/), has studied Hellenistic cuneiform culture and its textual evidence in the context of the earlier periods.

The Babylonian Chronicles are now easily accessible in the online editions of Finkel and van der Spek (2006–), as well as in Glassner (2004). This corpus is of great importance for the political history of the Hellenistic monarchies as well as topics such as the religious practices of the Seleucid kings and the judicial system (Joannès 2000). Another key source for the period, the foundation inscription of Antiochos I, is studied by Kuhrt and Sherwin-White (1991).

Geller (1997) deals with the very end of cuneiform culture, extending the scope beyond the cuneiform archives and libraries and drawing stimulating parallels with classical sources. Westenholz (2007) is a recent reaction.

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